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IBM PC, Amiga and ST

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L'EMPEREUR
Exclusive preview

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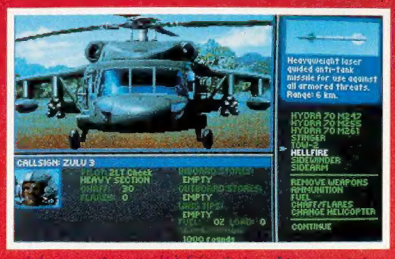

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Number 10
August 1991

He who plays, wins

STRATEGY

7 Armour-Geddon
Only the strong will survive, by Steven Wartofsky

10 Brigade Commander
Plus the Operation Desert Storm Scenario Disk, by George Campbell

12 Champion of the Raj
Currying favours, by John Scott

14 Third Reich
Boardgame conversion means it's winter for Poland and France, says Mark Green

16 Germ Crazy
John Scott gets bitten by the bugs

21 Strategy on the Run
Gameboy a-go-go, with Stuart Mitchell

25 The Choice is Yours
Or is it? Roger Musson asks how much choice players actually have in computer strategy games

SIMULATIONS

18 Flight Assignment: Air Transport Pilot
Steven Wartofsky gets into flight simulation at a serious level

Alan Grant of 2000AD fame turns adventure writer in Demoniak

ADVENTURE

51 Martian Dreams
Randy Snow is ultimately satisfied

52 Demoniak
Hard-core adventuring, by Theo Clarke

54 New Maps of Erewhon
Simon Corvinus kicks off his irregular column on role-playing and adventure games

59 Heart of China
Once beneath the gloss, by Ian Marsh

60 Timequest
A case of Hitler or miss, by Greg Ellsworth

61 Mama Sez...
Have a cosmic encounter

63 BAT off Pat
Martin Leverton passes on some tips

COVER SPECIALS

30 Chicago CES
Brian Walker reveals what's up and coming at the summer Consumer Electronics Show

63 Traders Disk Offer
Send off for our free demo disk of Linel's **Traders** (above) for Atari ST and Amiga gamers and get a taste for trading at a snail's pace!

REGULARS

39 Previews
Robin Smith's International Cricket, Halls of Montezuma, and **Charge of the Light Brigade**

40 Special Preview: Strike Commander
Brian Walker finds out what Chris Roberts has done since **Wing Commander**

42 Special Preview: L'Empereur
Deep Throat seeks out Koei's Napoleonic secrets

45 True Confessions
Strategy Plus staff reveal all about their innermost gaming desires

47 News
SSG comes from out of the blue, plus a chance to play around with Barbie's underwear...

49 Rebound
Readers write

66 Classifieds
Pick up a bargain

BOARDGAMES

65 Res-Publica and Muskateer
Reviewed by Brian Walker

L'empereur: Koei turns from ancient China and medieval Japan to Europe at the time of Napoleon

The price isn't right

The mystery of the missing cover disk has been intriguing and infuriating readers in equal measure according to our recent postbag. The majority it appears, couldn't give a hoot about the disk itself, but rightly object to having to pay for something that was promised but never delivered. Clearly this is very embarrassing for a magazine which has been positively smug about its integrity. So what happened?

Here's the scoop: the notion of a cover disk was touted simply to appease the newstrade, which refuses to believe that a computer games magazine will sell unless it comes with some sort of trinket attached (it was even suggested we put a pen on the cover!). Unfortunately the talks with the software house with which we were going to enter into an agreement, broke down. Had we proceeded, we would have been left to pick up the tab for duplicating the disks – some £10,000. By this time bar codes had been made up and the newstrade had been advised of the price increase, thus preventing a rapid U-turn.

So what now?

After resisting the temptation to scarper to Rio, we have ploughed the illicitly gained 'windfall' into production. Already the paper quality has been improved to enhance the clarity of screen shots. Clearly, this alone is not enough to stem the tidal wave of complaints, so, commencing with issue 12, *Strategy Plus* will be revert to its old price of £1.95, *and* there will be at least eight, possibly 16, extra pages. The subscription will revert to £21. Anyone who subscribed (or subscribes) at the rate of £25 will be credited with two extra issues.

Invasion USA

To cope with the increased workload that these changes will generate, new writers have been taken on. Welcome aboard, to use the parlance of their homeland, Greg Ellsworth, Randy Snow, and Big Mama. Like current team members Steve Wartofsky and Stuart Mitchell, the newcomers are all based in the USA, so watch out for some strange spellings.

Joining us too is 'Deep Throat' whose location, like his real name, must remain a secret. His forte is breaking and entering the premises of major software houses and exposing their secrets, making him a sort of B&E man cum investigative journalist. The preview of **L'Empereur** in this issue is the first product of his 'criminal' activities.

Most of the new crew are being brought in to beef up the adventure and CRPG section. There will now be regular walk-throughs, plus hints and tips courtesy of the mass of wisdom that is Big Mama.

Hopping on board in our next issue will be Commander Crunch who, when he is not trying to avoid rearranging the architecture of tall buildings, will be reporting from 'The Hangar' on the latest flight sims. Look out too for our 'Sports Desk' – a new feature that will offer a running commentary on the wacky world of sport sims and related issues. SP

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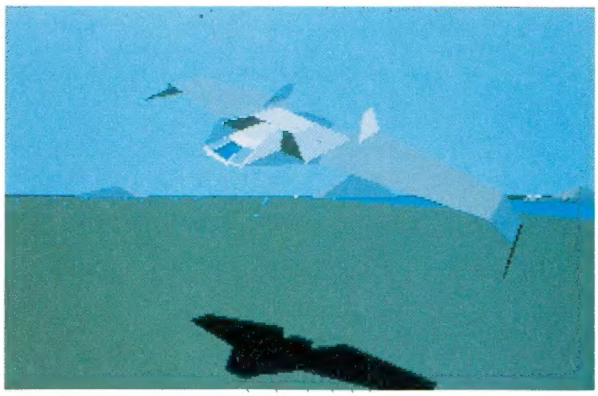
Armour-Geddon

Only the strong will survive

By Steven Wartofsky



Psygnosis is a fabulous arcade game designer. It has had a few clunkers, but more often than not, players know that when they get a Psygnosis product they're getting their money's worth, even if it may sometimes take subsequent hospitalization to recover from the injuries sustained while attempting to come to terms with the level of difficulty the programmers seem to take for granted.

Well, **Armour-Geddon** is not about to break the Psygnosis mould. More in the style of **Infestation** than any of the company's other releases, this one is rich in design but excruciating to play – it's not likely to appeal to serious flight sim or wargame fans. Nevertheless **Armour-Geddon** touches that middle ground where action, simulation and strategy sometimes meet.

The game starts off with another of the company's ongoing series of ray-traced demos, which are always a bit of fun to watch. The opening screens, with a wide range of selections, give the initial impression that there's quite a lot to the game. In fact, there is – if the player can survive long enough to spend some time with it.

Lighter side

I guess it's time for me to finally lodge a complaint with Psygnosis, after a few years of being delighted with what it has had on offer. Guys, lighten up! It's no fun dying all the time, and even veteran arcade gamers are going to come away from first rounds with this one with the impression that the best anyone can do is waste himself on the field of battle in vehicle after vehicle, hoping to get in a few shots on a seemingly invulnerable opponent in the process.

The designers seem well aware of this potential problem, because the game includes a disk with four separate scenarios, as well as both a hints page and an *Armour-Geddon Diary* walk-through to provide evidence that, in fact, at least a modicum of success is theoretically possible. But here's the problem, if I may quote a little from the manual hints section: 'Press the WAYPOINT BEACON key to activate your Waypoint Navigation. A small indicator appears on-screen (above your Engine Status indicator) to...' 'Nik! Hang on there! Can't follow you, my vehicle's under attack and it just got blown sky-high! What were you saying?'

Well, I exaggerate a little. Let's assume this design tendency will be taken for granted.

Same mould

Armour-Geddon is indeed a complex, real-time strategy game, in the mould of **Starglider II**, **Carrier Command** and **Dark Side**. It integrates incredibly intense action with the need to do a good job of managing resources and planning a pattern of attack.

The player must first go through a research and development phase, and allocate engineers and scientists to develop and produce a series of vehicles, weapons and instruments necessary to the task of defeating the opponent and collecting the five pieces of the neutron bomb.

This bomb is part of the means available to accomplish the task of eliminating a beam cannon being aimed by the Ultimate Bad Guys at planet Earth.

Six different vehicles are available in the game, and each handles quite distinctly and serves a specific purpose.

The hovercraft, for instance, glides quickly over both land and water and serves as an excellent scout craft. The light tank moves even faster and proves a formidable attack vehicle in the right hands (not mine, yet). The helicopter does a nice job of simulating chopper performance in a rudimentary way, and can perform both tank-attack, base guard duty and swift ground attack.

The jet fighter is the primary full-scale assault weapon, and performs magnificently (and rather oddly – if you do a steep bank and the engine loses power, the plane slows incredibly and turns sharply, putting new meaning behind the concept 'loses energy in turns', one of the things that most *real* flight sims are faulted for not doing!).

Finally, the stealth bomber and heavy tank both serve as object-collecting facilities; the bomber also performs yeoman service by dropping off fuel caches and the like for other units on more extended missions.

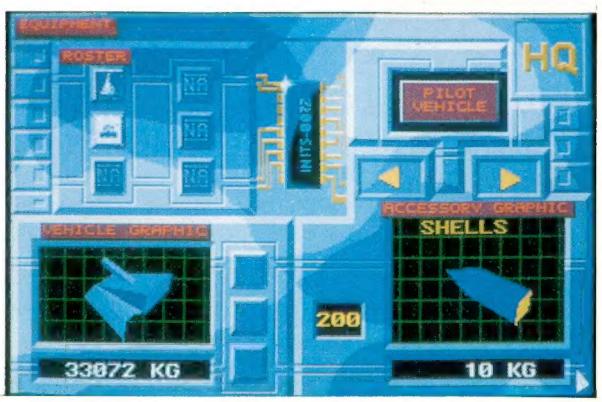
Each vehicle needs to be developed and produced, and can be equipped with a host of different weapons and protection devices, as well as extra fuel. (Training mode, which allows neither wins nor losses, dispenses with the resource management side of the game and provides lots of everything.) Lasers, bombs of all sorts, air-to-air missiles, air-to-ground missiles, cloaking devices, telepods (for rapid deployment of forces to front-line areas – I bet the US military would like to have a few of these), all the vehicles, and more can be researched and put into production.

Designed by
Paul Hunter and Ed Scio

Published by
Psygnosis

Amiga, ST and PC

Keyboard, mouse and joystick support



The essential raw materials for production are consumable, and must be replenished by recycling recently decimated (hah! quadrimated would be more like it) enemy forces.

Different weapons and vehicles are useful at different stages of the game, so some thought has to be given about what needs priority.

Project priorities

The number of scientists and engineers put on any particular project determines (in part) the rate of development and deployment, so priorities can be controlled by adding or removing members of the team (stealth bombers take forever to make – don't waste these like soda cans or you'll be sorry).

If the player has overproduced units for early stages of the game that are no longer necessary for play later on, they can be recycled for more raw materials. Running out of any of the basic raw materials halts production of any item that needs it.

It is easy just to stay underground for a while, watch the beam cannon increase in energy as it readies for fire, and happily construct away. This won't win **Armour-Geddon**, though: time and attention must be paid almost immediately to a number of different factors.

For one thing, the components of the neutron bomb need to be located as quickly as possible, so effective attack plans can be implemented. For another, power lines to the beam cannon can be destroyed by hitting them at certain points, thus reducing energy to the cannon.

Attack units must thus be routed regularly to key points to keep the pressure on this aspect of the game. Enemy units must be scouted out to determine their location, likelihood of counter-attack, and strength.

Final countdown

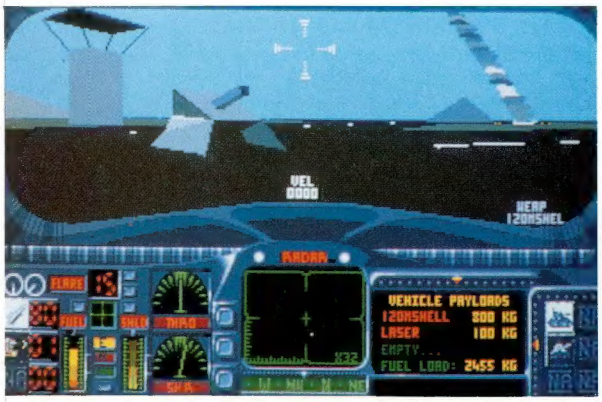
Finally, putting together a successful attack in a series of phases will require some careful analysis and implementation; ideally, once familiar enough with the design, the player can start up a combination of different vehicles for a multi-unit attack. This is not for the faint-of-heart, though, and at least for this reviewer, proved extremely difficult to implement at all successfully (I could have used another two hands, minimum).

The intelligence map available in the game is regularly updated to display all discovered units; it will also indicate the positions of the player's craft.

It can be used to plot waypoints for each vehicle, which help guide the player towards the right targets.

One thing that seems missing in the design and which would have made it *immensely* more successful is the ability to set a vehicle on true auto-pilot.

Vehicles can be left running while the player jumps into others, but they don't automatically follow the waypoint plotted into the navigation system, and will not initiate an attack on their own. Left to its own devices, for instance, a tank or hovercraft will just run in the direction the player was last going until it's out of fuel. Psygnosis obviously started to plan some work on this aspect of **Armour-Geddon**, as the aircraft, at least, will fly to a waypoint and circle there until the player returns (or until they're shot down).



The enemy units' artificial intelligence is interesting enough to provide for some variety in the game. I found that sometimes, when I took too long to initiate an attack, I'd launch to the surface only to find squads of enemy helicopters, hovercraft, and other nasties just waiting to pummel me into scattered polygons.

Attacking defence units before deploying one of the heavier, slower vehicles to pick up supplies or a portion of neutron bomb will limit retaliatory activity during the transport phase.

And wiping out an airstrip will reduce air attacks over the player's own base.

Armour-Geddon comes with some beautiful graphics and animations. Unlike most of the IBM conversions that have been showing for the Amiga lately, this solid-fill design runs smoothly and quickly on a stock A500. There are lots of flight-sim-style outside and internal views, which won't be of much use until the player is really in control of the game, because the time it takes to figure out which direction you're looking in is often all the time an enemy helicopter needs to send you in all directions at once.

There are night-time situations, which are even harder (though the player can just sit things out and wait for daylight), especially when it comes to returning to base and getting a vehicle back underground. During the war, flashes of light illuminate the skies and horizons, making (again, especially at night) for a real fireworks display.

The game comes on three disks (two are needed for play, the third contains the four extra scenarios), and also features a multi-player option via direct serial link. Control is primarily by the joystick, although the mouse is used well for various option selections when not rushing around at full panic in a vehicle. The sound effects are all wonderful; **Armour-Geddon** features some of the best engine sounds to show in a vehicle simulation game, and they go a long ways to helping provide credibility for the performance of each vehicle.

I would have liked to see **Armour-Geddon** show up as something less of a hybrid. With some work it could have been much more of a simulator-style air combat game, in the mould of **Flight of the Intruder**.

Or, going in a different direction, it could have been more of a *Battlemechs*-style game, tossing realism out the window for strenuous, fantasy electronic battlefield play. But the game falls somewhere outside such desires, and requires the player's adjustment to the terms of engagement it imposes.

Brutal beating

A player who is willing to make such adjustments (and to survive the initially brutal beatings) will find there's plenty on offer to work with. I just wish my hovercraft were a little hardier. SP

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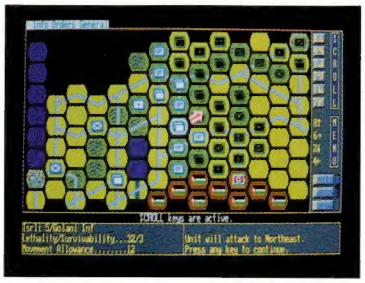
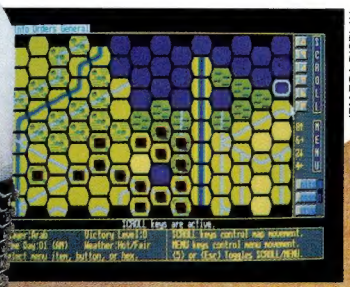
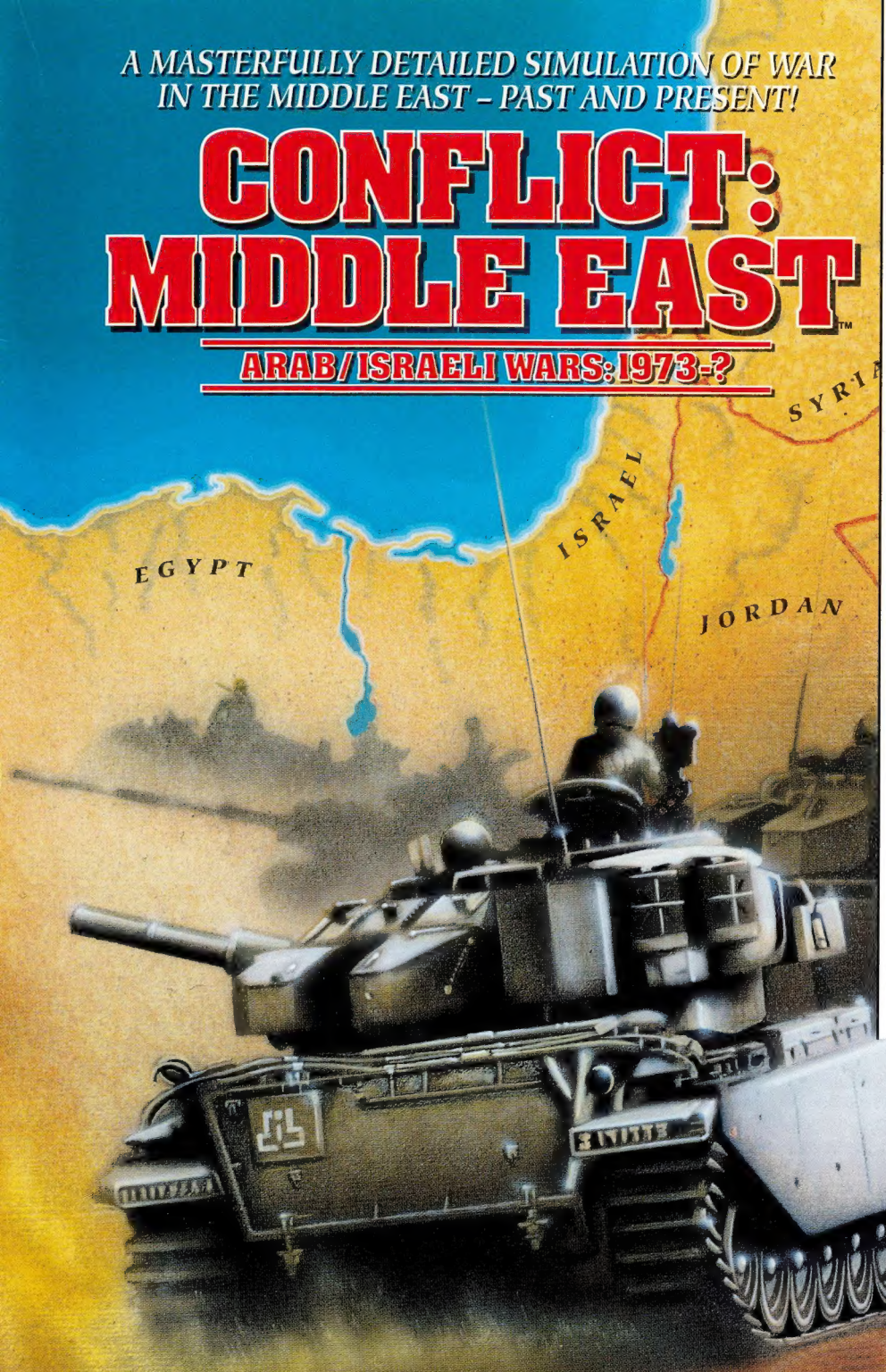


Israeli troops counterattack the Syrian thrust into the Golan Heights.

Israeli player allocates F-4 fighters for air superiority and to hit Arab targets.



In a hypothetical conflict, the Egyptian Army prepares to strike across the Suez Canal into the demilitarized Sinai.



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Screenshots are only intended to be illustrative of the game play and not the screen graphics which vary considerably between different formats in quality and appearance and are subject to the computer's specifications.

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Brigade Commander

Plus: Operation Desert Storm Data Disk

By George Campbell

Brigade Commander is, as the name suggests, a wargame at brigade level. It is capable of coping with just about any type of warfare in fairly recent history, from the Second World War up to the early part of next century. It is best suited to modern conflict, involving the very latest military hardware.

In the role of commander, the player doesn't have absolute control over all the units at his disposal, because some are considered divisional assets. In any case, **Brigade Commander** is played in real time, ensuring that there just isn't enough time to pay attention to each and every aspect of the battle. It is possible to become involved in fine detail planning at any point, but there must be a trade-off as other units tend to be neglected.

Although seven scenarios and 10 maps are provided, this is primarily a scenario-builder and not a typical wargame. It is more versatile than a normal wargame, but to get the most out of the system requires some dedication. The hard part is determining how best to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of particular weapon systems. This is where the data disk comes in handy, obviating the need for in-depth research.

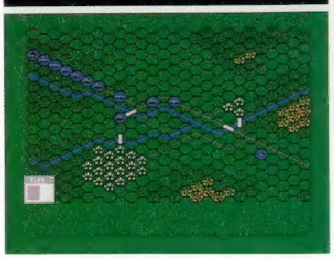
The battlefield is variable, depending upon the scenario. The map is composed of hexes, each 500 metres across, with a screen measuring 16 x 26 km.

Mapped out

Individual maps may have one, two or four screens. Given that the map may be up to 16 km by 26 km, anything which could conceivably occur in warfare can be simulated, with a little imagination.

Terrain features are varied and functional, enabling convincing maps to be created. The terrain editor is quite idiot proof, prohibiting such things as illogical road or bridge placement. There are three height levels, adding an element of depth to the action. All terrain features have an effect on movement, defence, and spotting.

There are 22 unit categories, including four types of aircraft. The ground units range from mortars and anti-tank guns to multiple rocket launchers and missiles. Even the horse-drawn cart is available, for operations in which one or both protagonists rely upon more primitive logistic support. It is possible to designate certain units as support at



divisional level, permitting artillery strikes, close air support, and naval gunfire support.

Units are fully defined by parameters such as speed, defence type, profile, morale, initiative, weapons, and extended capabilities. For example, it is possible to differentiate between two attack helicopters such as the Mi-28 Havoc and AH-64 Apache by allocating appropriate characteristics. Indeed, it is an easy matter to add new variants with a minimum of fuss.

The nine defence types range from Immobile Infantry to Super Heavy. The former is associated with towed artillery, conferring a self-defence capacity, the latter is reserved mainly for new generation main battle tanks. Attack helicopters would be Protected, giving them reduced vulnerability to small arms fire. The profile of a unit is closely linked to defence, but is also used in spotting and mobility.

Low morale may lead to a unit being quickly dispersed under fire. Initiative is used to decide whether a unit is able to seek an advantage outside the normal chain of command. High initiative allows a unit to engage targets of opportunity, but it may also cause problems.

Extended capabilities refer to such advantages as advanced armour (whether Chobham, depleted uranium or ceramic cells), night vision equipment, improved mobility, the ability to fire on the move, and amphibious capability. There are 13 extended capabilities.

Weapons factory

Weapon types are of obvious importance, with each unit able to use up to three weapons. For example, a tank might possess an armour-piercing gun, a coaxial machine-gun and an AA cannon. The different weapon types are: light and heavy armour-piercing guns, anti-tank guided weapons, small arms, anti-aircraft guns and missiles, howitzers, mortars, rockets, bombs, and guided weapons in general.

Each weapon has certain attributes: firepower, accuracy, rate of fire, maximum and minimum ranges, maximum ammunition, and any restrictions on engaging targets. Guidance type and crew training may also be used to uniquely identify a particular weapon. It is thus possible to represent the T-80's Songster missile by adding anti-aircraft rounds in place of normal main armament rounds.

The specifications editor permits a palette of unit types to be created, prior to copying them onto the scenario map. Units can easily be imported

so that little work is needed to set up a pool of accurately defined units. The idea is to create units with a role in mind, to fill in any gaps that exist, or to rectify any omissions.

All units have a value, their combat weighting, which can be used to help build a balanced force for each side.

The composition of two forces might vary considerably, depending on the scenario's needs. For example, Soviet helicopters and attack aircraft might attempt to hit a NATO convoy escorted by helicopters. Bear in mind that there's little lasting challenge in an 'eliminate all opposition' scenario.

Positions are pre-set locations in a scenario with appropriate victory points attached to their capture. These include towns, fortifications, command posts, and terrain features. The continued ownership of such key positions is obviously an important element of play.

Long-range artillery and attack aircraft are controlled at divisional level, essentially meaning that they are subject to restricted use in combat. These support units may be assigned targets and nudged in the right direction only from time to time. Priority weightings are assigned to such assets, determining how effective they are.

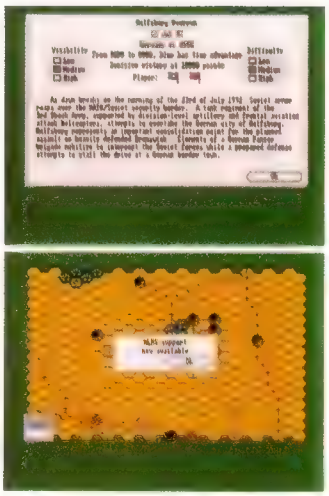
Brigade Commander has seven scenarios, including the obligatory tutorial. These include some interesting situations, particularly Wilshire Revisited, an engagement between British and Soviet units. I found the Mi-28 very useful for stopping Challengers in their tracks.

Landing problems

Similarly, Eckernforde Overrun pits German units against the Soviets in a difficult landing operation. Most of the scenarios have disclaimers, stating that they're not meant to be realistic, but nevertheless they are good examples of what can be achieved.

Moving units is a little awkward at first, but soon becomes second nature. It is important to move units with a view to establishing some strategy, rather than have them bumbling into enemy positions. The early part of a scenario must be used profitably to load up infantry and get them into action. As in reality, all available assets should be used to avoid having units destroyed piecemeal.

An element of frustration can creep in when support units don't arrive on time, don't do as ordered, or aren't available when needed. **Brigade Commander** won't do the player any favours in this respect, but it's all the more realistic for having such features.



At all times it is possible to alter a scenario to achieve a better blend of action and accuracy. The difficulty level may also be adjusted to make it even tougher.

The **Operation Desert Storm Data Disk** provides a valuable pool of units for use in the **Brigade Commander** system

There are a total of 260 units from the USA, Iraq, Syria, France, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UK. For example, the US units include the M60A1, M60A3, M1, and M1A1, ensuring that there is no shortage of tanks. Iraq has a wide selection of French, British, Brazilian, Chinese, and Soviet units.

The British equipment, while not exhaustive, includes Chieftain, Challenger, Warrior, Rapier, the Buccaneer, and the Tornado. There is no sign of the trusty Jaguar, either among the British units or those of the French. MLRS is also absent from the British list, but appears in the French list. As far as I'm aware the French don't possess this system.

Withheld goods

Accompanying the units are 19 maps, covering such locations as the Kuwait streets, Khafji, Wafrah, and general maps for Armour, Counter Attack, and a Beach Assault. These enable any number of scenarios to be developed without the need to create maps. Unfortunately I wasn't able to obtain information about the scenarios provided with the disk because my copy simply refused to give up the goods.

The data disk is essential if only to cut out all the hard work of accurately simulating modern units. Units can be adapted from those provided, using them simply as raw material. The disk comes with a handy book describing the major weapon systems in some detail.

Brigade Commander offers players the opportunity to control powerful assets in a real-time combat situation.

The action hots up as soon as an engagement develops, and players will be hard pressed to cope with everything going on at once. I looked on it as an exercise in keeping an unfeasible number of spinning dinner plates atop too many poles. Be warned, though, a good deal of research on modern units will need to be conducted to get the most out of it. I'm definitely looking forward to acquiring any future data disk releases, which will hopefully keep the game abreast of current events. SP

Designed by
Gary Rush

Published by
TTR Development Inc

Amiga only

Release date
September

Champion of the Raj

Currying favours

By John Scott

The mighty Mogul emperors ruled India for two centuries, bringing civilization and creating wonders such as the Taj Mahal (the wonder of the world, not the restaurant). But by 1800 their empire was crumbling as India once again became a land of warring states.

Champion of the Raj begins when the evil Thuggees have taken advantage of the state of anarchy to murder thousands of people – sacrifices to their goddess Kali the Destroyer.

The power of the Thuggees is so pervasive that no one state can hope to triumph over them. What is needed is a strong leader who can unite India against their evil.

The game can be played by one to six people, as the six potential supremos slug it out using military might and a touch of diplomacy. For a pretty easy game choose the Viceroy of the British East India Company, or for the big challenge try the Chief of the Gurkhas.

The game begins with a pretty but over-long animation sequence, and the player is then presented with a map of the sub-continent, and a tiny flag showing the current allegiance of each state. By clicking on these it is possible to access detailed information on such matters as the size and quality of their troops and fortifications, level of law, general development, and cash.

Before resorting to the military option it is possible to attempt to make an alliance with another leader, though if he is not sufficiently impressed he might choose to be 'unavailable'.

Elephantine excesses

One way in which it is possible to gain enough status to make this feasible is to organise a Durbah – a parade with elephants. The greater the number of beasts in this pachydermal parade, the more one's status will improve – and the more cash it will cost. If another leader is interested in talks, he will issue an invitation to a tiger hunt or an elephant race. These are just two of the arcade sections of the game.

In the tiger hunt, the object is to shoot the tigers before they attack, taking care not to hit any of the beaters who are flushing them out. The elephant race is a straightforward vertically scrolling race with some dubious tactics (whipping opponents out of the saddle, for example). I always cringe at arcade sequences, but these were a cinch – perhaps too easy, because they became a bit tedious after a few plays. Failure will not gain any converts, but success in shootin' or racin' will win followers and increase the size of the empire.

Should diplomacy fail, the next stage is to recruit (that is, pay for) troops, perhaps upgrade their weapons, and then go and kick ass. In battle the first stage is to decide how many troops to commit – the manual suggests it's a good idea to have odds of at least 2:1 in favour. Then it is possible for a player to command the troops personally, which involves a semi-arcade sequence; for each troop type (such as infantry or elephants) a particular option is selected (advance, retreat or circle). After the battle a new state will (perhaps) be added to the empire.

If a state that contains an enemy palace is captured, there is another little arcade sequence where a hero must shoot his way into the palace before the incumbents can make good their escape. A sequence similar to this also occurs when the final raid on the Thuggee temple takes place. In addition to all this, various random elements (floods, rebellions, assassination attempts) help to keep the player from resting on his laurels.

I found it a real chore playing this game long enough to write a fair review until, that is, I sat down with my notes to write it. It was only then that I realized that the only real problem with the game is that it is so unbearably slow. The graphics are roughly equivalent to early Cinemaware, though the tinkling tunes become irritating rather quickly. But it is *slow*. The manual says that the program uses extra RAM to reduce disk access, but at one point, I went and made a coffee while waiting for the next section of the game to load. I find this odd, given that I've played games of at least equal complexity and greater graphical content without such godawful waiting around.

This slowness, together with the fact that certain (minor) sequences mentioned in the documentation do not in fact exist, left me with the overwhelming impression that there was a good game in there, botched by a bad conversion to this format. Perhaps the owners of super-duper high-speed PCs mentioned in last month's issue will enjoy this game, but as far as the Amiga is concerned there are just too many other games of this type which offer more in terms of game play and speed. SP

Designed by
Pete Austin

Published by
Mirrorsoft

Available for the
PC and Amiga

PC version supports
VGA and AdLib
soundcards

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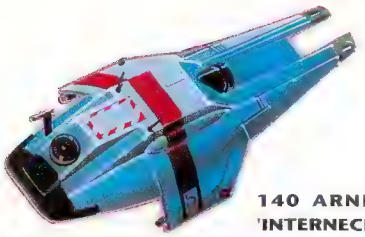

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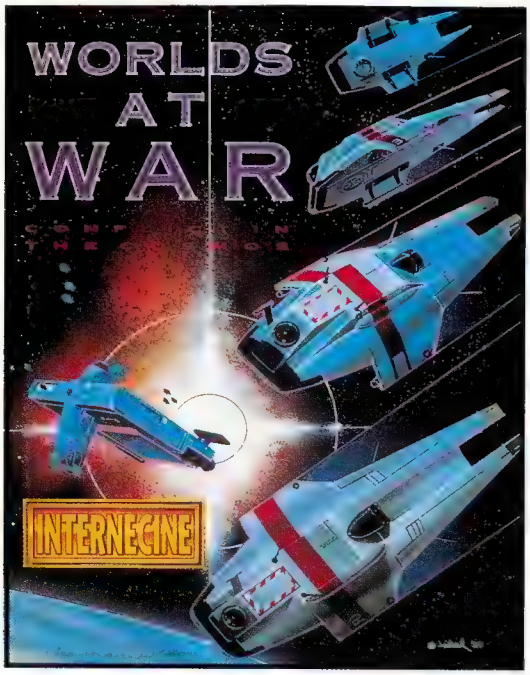

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A game of planetary conquest

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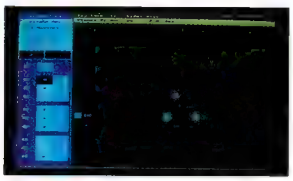
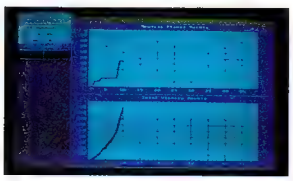
Naval combat - on a galactic scale!



Naval map showing production/flight level allocation and hyper-space connections between planet systems



Victory screen showing neutral planets taken by both sides and total victory points for both sides

"Worlds at War" is a game of real strategy for one or two players. It's a game of naval & amphibious combat, on a galactic scale. Simple in concept, 'Worlds at War' can be played in an hour as a small, tactical study with the flavour of a chess game; or for a weekend, as a campaign game with vast regions of territory to explore, huge fleets to manouevre, and neutral planets to conquer.

The scrolling battle map can be configured for any size from 10 x 10 through 50 x 50 The size of the map profoundly affects game length & strategy

Pieces represent base planets, neutral planets, task forces of different types, bomber formations, missile barrages, scouts & marine landing craft. You start the game with a certain number of production points & build a fleet based on the strategic requirements of the randomly generated star map. A small trickle of supplies will reach your base planet each turn, but the game is primarily one of tactical combat, not production.

Other Features:

75 page manual, covering gameplay & discussing: "How to attack neutral planets", "Three Suggested Strategies", "Developing a Scouting Plan", and "Massing vs Dispersion".

A Victory Point Graph lets you assess your play and plan your moves. It displays neutral planet points and total points for each turn of the game.

A Full Map View gives you a snapshot view of the battle. Map controls enable you to highlight the different components of your fleet.

The Side Bar Display shows Planet and Task Force production schedules, Flight Operations, Unit Status & Combat Results. Two exit windows provide system feedback & game information.

Full game save, including autosave.

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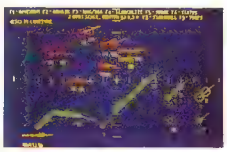
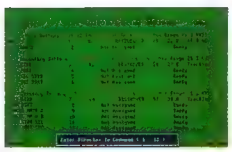
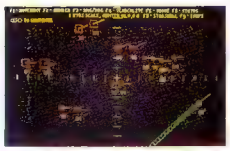


Battlelines engaging, while destroyers lay smoke.



Control guns in automatic or manual modes.



Scroll & change scales to "zero in" on the action!

NAVAL SURFACE COMBAT TACTICAL SIMULATION 1922-1945 Battleships, cruisers, destroyers, shore batteries and many other naval units engage in deadly, exciting War at Sea!

ACTION STATIONS! is unique – a combat modelling system designed by an active duty naval officer to test computerized tactical decision support systems has been adapted into a commercial simulation of unparalleled accuracy and authenticity.

THIS IS NOT A TOY! Developed from a huge data base, including the US NAVAL WAR COLLEGE "FIRE EFFECT SYSTEM" from 1922 - 1945, this game is authentic, detailed, sophisticated, challenging – and FUN!

EASY TO PLAY: An effortless menu system allows you complete control of your forces.

SIMPLE OR SOPHISTICATED: Take full command or delegate some actions to "computer subordinates".

AUTHENTIC SCROLLING BATTLE PLOT tracks your forces and enemy units. This is not a "squares" game, but what you would expects in a warship's Combat Information Centre.

21 DISPLAYS/STATUS BOARDS gives you a clear, instant access to information on individual units and your entire fleet.

DETAILED, THOROUGH TREATMENT of smoke, starshells, flares, searchlights, radar, shore batteries, stack gasses, aircraft recce and spotting, burning oil slicks, capsized hulls, weather and MORE!

A wily, cunning computer opponent or play a friend.

Seven levels of difficulty.

Accurate "Detect to Engage" sequencing.

Torpedo fire control computer.

Ships are modeled exhaustively.

Build and generate scenario.

Save game.

Ship classes.

Command ships individually or in formation.

Gunnery calculations.

Four mission types: Strike, Battle, Escort & Raid.

THIRD REICH

Winter for Poland and France

By Mark Green

Avalon Hill's boardgame **Third Reich** is probably the greatest strategic level wargame ever produced. As one of its biggest fans, I was first in the queue to review the pre-production program when it first arrived at *Strategy Plus* HQ. The program I tested was reportedly '90%' complete. The photocopied manual was some way less so, though it would be unfair to criticize what was obviously still in the 'rough' stage. Despite this, within minutes I had set up the start positions and was soon into the 1939 scenario.

Third Reich is a strategic level wargame of the European/North Africa arena of the Second World War, in which each turn represents three months. The participants are Germany and Italy v Britain, France, USSR and the USA. Units are set at corps level: armour, infantry, and paratroops; air forces and fleets round out the major combat units.

In standard boardgame style, the map is covered with a hex grid to regulate unit positions and movement.

The 'board' is divided into three areas or 'fronts': Western, Mediterranean, and Eastern. National boundaries, capital cities, ports, rivers and mountains are the main terrain features. Cities are very important: capitals need to be captured to conquer a country, and objective cities score victory points. Cities can also be used to base airfleets.

In addition to the 1939 scenario, there is also a 1942 scenario as well as a full campaign game.

Starting points

An important feature of **Third Reich** is the economic system that underlies the game. Each country has a core production of BRPs (basic resource points) to which are added points gained from conquest or economic growth. BRPs are required to declare war on countries, undertake offensives and to build or replace units.

The total of BRPs is calculated at the beginning of a year and then spent through the next four turns to the start of the next year. It is thus important to manage your country well and, especially for the Germans, to conquer the minor neutral countries.

Each turn is divided into phases. The first is to select Declarations of War on any new countries that are to be attacked. The opponent then sets up forces for those countries, which become minor allies. At the same time an activity level for each of the three fronts must be selected. The activity levels are: offence, attrition and pass. The rest of the turn consists of movement, tank breakthrough, builds and strategic redeployment.

All out attack

Setting the computer to play the Axis forces, I deployed a strong defence of Poland and France. The computer handled the attack on Poland well, using infantry, armour and airpower to make a breakthrough and then exploiting with armour to take Warsaw in the first turn (autumn 1939). More questionably, Germany immediately attacked Belgium, Holland and Denmark.

With the bulk of the computer's forces in Poland, little progress was made in the west, apart from the conquest of Denmark. The French and the British weren't having any of this, and I advanced strong forces into Belgium and The Netherlands to protect these minor allies. The Italians, meanwhile, declared war on France while the computer sent reinforcements into Germany.

French fortitude

The Axis then declared war on Yugoslavia, but were so stretched in the Low Countries they could make little progress. In fact by the end of 1940 France was still strong and holding Germany on the Rhine.

Elsewhere, the British had conquered Libya, and the Russians had swallowed the Baltic States in anticipation of the expiry of the Nazi-Soviet pact in autumn 1941.

The computer plays much better in defence. A player running the Axis powers will have a challenge to emulate the historical example – overrunning Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France in four turns. I suspect the difference between attacking and defensive capabilities comes from the relative simplicity of writing a program to run a defence, compared with the more complex calculations involved in amassing an attack. Generally the computer plays competently, but not brilliantly.

Grumble guts

Third Reich, however, has to be at least a complex a game as chess; not many buyers of this program will be old *grognards* of 15 years' boardgaming experience.

The point, click and drag interface is a pleasure to use. Scrolling, by means of directional arrows, provides a convenient and rapid way of getting around the map. The map graphics themselves are excellent – the pale blue provides a subtle backdrop that makes the task at hand that much easier to implement. The option of a split screen is excellent also, as it allows the player to examine two different areas simultaneously – essential in such a grand strategic game such as this.

At first I thought this new version would be too simple for the **Third Reich** fan and too complex for the newcomer. Six hours' play changed this viewpoint.

The fan will buy it anyway and accept the weaknesses – in any event there is a two-player option – while the newcomer will buy it or risk missing out on an excellent rendition of a classic. SP

Programmed by
Thalean Software

Published by
Avalon Hill

All formats

1-2 players

UK release date
August

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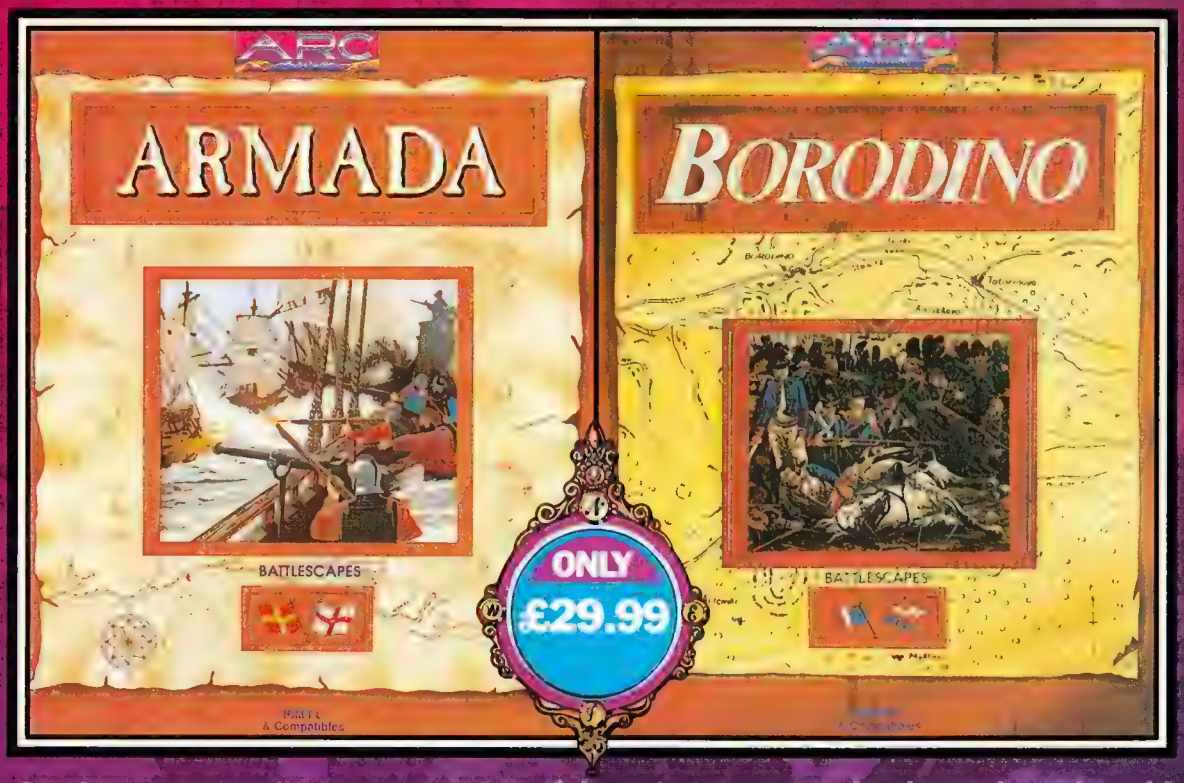

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Starting as a great adventure, ending in human tragedy, the five days the Spanish Armada laboured from Plymouth to the Isle of Wight is a classic episode in English history. Take the helm as Lord Howard and defend this realm against the Spaniards, or even rewrite history and lead the invasion fleet against the likes of Howard, Drake and Frobisher.

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Take command from Napoleon and replan the strategy for one of the most disappointing encounters of the Russian invasion, at Borodino, where 131,000 French met 120,000 Russians and gained little more than a moral victory. Or take the role of Prince Kustov to lead the Russian defence and plan the Emperor's downfall.

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GERM CRAZY

Bitten by the bugs

By John Scott

The easiest way to get into the game, advises the manual, 'is to make yourself a cup of coffee, sit down and have a read through this guide. If you don't understand it, read it again very carefully. Then load the game, and quickly move through the rest of the manual... Then, when you have the general idea of how it all works, read this guide again, and revelation should hit you like a ton of bricks.'

In fact it required several cups of coffee and re-readings of the guide – this is emphatically *not* one of those games where the player opens the box, boots the disk and starts playing. This is partly because **Germ Crazy** is a highly complex game, and partly because it is that rare phenomenon – a totally original game concept.

Perhaps it's easiest to regard it as a wargame, where the object is to fend off attacking forces of various types. This can happen on a single battlefield, on a slightly larger scale, or even be a fully fledged war. That's nothing new, you might think, but hold on – in **Germ Crazy** the war is fought inside the human body.

My left foot

Anti-bacterial agents zoom around zapping the enemy bugs, building bio-defences, laying the cellular equivalent of minefields, and much more, in a war which rages all the way from the left foot to the right brain lobe, via heart, lungs, limbs and so on.

Since the object of the game is to keep the patient alive long enough for his natural immunity to pitch in and kick the bugs out, it is important to ensure the battlefield itself is kept in good nick, not normally a prime consideration in a wargame! To this end it is necessary to ensure that the patient gets regular food, sleep, relaxation, and frequent visits to the doctor.

Soon cash becomes a major consideration: should the patient seek an expensive private specialist, throw himself on the mercy of the NHS (ha!), or find a back street cut-price quack?

Besides some diagnosis, this is where it's possible to find medication, removal (and perhaps replacement) of hopelessly diseased organs, and perhaps (in the back streets) even sell an organ to raise a bit of much-needed cash.

Energy is to the body what cash is in the external world, and is expended in the creation of anti-bug agents, repair hormone, and various other ways. If an energy deficit occurs the body effectively begins to feed off itself, aiding the germs in their evil work.

In the actual battle for each body section, quick thinking is of the essence – it all occurs in real time.

Arcade skills are not necessary, but sharp cerebral skills are vital. Each body area calls for quite different tactics as the disease appears to attack them in various ways. Therefore it's probably a good idea to use the game option that allows combat to be restricted to one single area (such as the famous left foot) and then attempt to wipe out the virus in a larger body area, such as an entire limb. In smaller games such as this, the object is the total elimination of the disease and the options are restricted to the basic tactics needed for the battle. On progressing to the full body game the entire range of medical possibilities becomes available, together with the opportunity to gauge the state of your patient by looking at his facial expression (and how much of his body has been reduced to bare bone by nasty green slime!).

In the full game it is also possible to take control of the lymph nodes and blood-clotting factors in an attempt to stop or slow the speed of the disease.

I like this game and I've had a lot of fun playing it. **Germ Crazy** is another game that has obviously been very capably programmed by people who enjoyed and cared about their subject.

All this is in complete contrast to the unbelievably tacky and cheap looking packaging of the game which really makes it look like something thrown together by Sid and Bob of Ripoffsoft on a Sunday afternoon just to relieve the punters of a few quid.

Shame about the face

Electronic Zoo might like to note that I for one wouldn't give a second glance to anything that looks this shoddy.

It's a strange, but a highly original and entertaining game that certainly deserves better packaging. Some of the blurb on the back of the box also gives a misleading impression about the nature of the game. Don't be put off by the externals – **Germ Crazy** has a body and soul. SP

Designed by
Open Mind (Andrew Williamson, John Staniford, and Ian Williams)

Published by
Electronic Zoo

Available for the Amiga and ST

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FLIGHT ASSIGNMENT: AIR TRANSPORT PILOT

Let's get serious

By Steven Wartofsky

Designed by SubLogic

Published by SubLogic

PC only

EGA, CGA and Hercules

Requires 12Mhz AT or faster

Announced and advertised well before the software was completed (and all suits between SubLogic and the Bruce Artwick Organization had been settled), **FA:ATP** has proved worth the wait.

Part of what I consider the next generation of flight simulations, this design makes the actual flight modelling and aircraft control just one component of a larger model. One consequence of this is that **FA:ATP** is likely to prove daunting to anyone eager for fast and furious action, and may even prove frustrating to master for the veteran flight sim fan. Arcade flight sim jocks need not apply. The period of learning, however, that is necessary to become comfortable with all the controls is time well spent, and time that the software, as well as the documentation, considers part of the simulation experience.

Heavy help

US simulation software has become famous for its incredible depth of design; extensive documentation is there not just to make a buyer feel like he has got his money's worth, but also to complement the software package in important ways. Microprose, for instance, makes a hefty manual part of most of its releases, and includes technical and historical information to give the player more to work on.

One might say that in this genre, such technical and historical details serve a purpose similar to that served by the gallery of weapons and spells present in computer role-playing games; they become opportunities for the player's own creative activity, and the more variety and relation between such details, the more interesting the potential combinations and results.

Prior to **FA:ATP**, though, with the notable exception of **Flight Simulator 4,** such details have been available primarily in the manual. Complex and effective as it is, for instance, **F-19**'s on-screen representations of weapons and flight systems are nevertheless clear simplifications of the reality they intend to represent.

SubLogic decided to take a different path with its design and really push the possibility of providing such levels of detail and realism *within* the software. The strengths and weakness of **FA:ATP** both derive from this choice. On the one hand, by focusing on maximum realism in terms of accessibility and variety of controls, the simulation affords many layers of depth that provide more satisfaction over the long haul than emphasis on just one aspect might. On the other hand, such variety and detail necessitates much patience and practice and study; it's simply not possible to boot the game up for a half-hour's blast and have much fun with it.

FA:ATP's manual wastes no space on the history of civilian aviation, but proves hefty none the less (in fact, it would compare favorably in size with average business software documentation). Its explanations are broken down into three areas: first, the introduction of the user to the control of the system; second, the presentation of a series of useful and progressive lessons on the basics of controlling a commercial jetliner, as well as on the fundamentals of handling air traffic communications; and third, provision of technical information on the modelled planes, along with a series of maps and approach charts, documenting all the routes, radio navigation utilities, and communications facilities present in the 26 major US airports included in the design.

An indication of the situational realism the player is about to encounter is evident from the inclusion of copies of real-world Jeppesen charts for the airports at the back of the manual. Suffice it to say that the

software is so effective at being able to use the information provided on these charts that some players' first complaints were about a couple of wrong control tower frequencies for some of the airports! The manual is supplemented as well with a quick reference handbook, which proves handy while the user is still learning the keyboard controls.

Despite the mass of information to digest, the best way to get into **FA:ATP** is simply to get it booted up and follow the lesson plan provided. A series of modes have been saved to serve as lessons (much like **FS4**), and can be accessed in any order and as frequently as the player needs. Regular use of the pause key is a must the first few times out, and while it breaks the sense of continuity, it also provides much needed breathing room until mastery of the basics of flight control has been achieved.

The first thing the player will notice is that **FA:ATP** is a startlingly different experience from every other flight sim out there. While it's possible to just take off and fly around, it's really not lots of fun, as the average 737 just isn't that adept at split-S turns and the like.

The frame rate animation both out the front windshield and in the many views is perfectly adequate, though nowhere near as glassy-smooth as **FS4** can be on a fast PC. A wide range of options, however, is available to turn various scenery features on and off to speed up the display on slower machines and provide better frame rates for trickier manoeuvres during, say, landing approaches. The simulation runs well on anything operating at 12MHz or faster.

It should be noted that the default scenery in **FA:ATP** is quite beautiful, especially at night. The entire continental US is covered, with details focused on airports at major cities, of course. The 26 airports include all those currently covered by commercial airline carrier routes. Some 330 secondary airports are also included for practice with the Shorts twin-engine turb-prop, if the player wants to start off small before building up to the major leagues.

While more detail may be present in some of the areas that CompuServe users (and others) have designed for **FS4** with their add-on **Aircraft and Scenery Designer** utility, the scenery is as detailed and realistic as it needs to be for the kind of flying taking place (mostly high-altitude). It would be nice if SubLogic could license the routines from Velocity's **Jetfighter II**, though. Once into the simulation, scenery's likely to be the *least* important thing occupying one's attention, in any event.

SubLogic Airlines features five different aircraft models. The Shorts 360 is the most familiar in terms of performance, and provides for a small-scale introduction into the simulation.

The Airbus A320 is the first 'fly-by-wire' commercial airliner, and is included in **FA:ATP** to help introduce players to the tricker large planes. The electronically controlled Airbus is a good choice because it limits the damage the player can do. There are direct correlations between keyboard input and plane response output, which can help beginners immensely because they are likely to overcontrol the other big jets.

This review might leave the impression that FA:ATP is as much fun as installing Unix. Quite to the contrary, this review wouldn't be complete without mentioning that, once past the initial confusion bound to be present in a first encounter with the software, FA:ATP is as absorbing and addictive as anything else out there. Even more importantly, it's likely to hold a player's interest for many months (if not years!) to come

The Boeing 737 is the next step up the learning curve, and proves a nicely balanced plane, with quick control response and the first introduction to more realistic aircraft handling. Until the system has been mastered, the 737 proves the best compromise between realism and ease of use. Next comes the Boeing 767, slightly more difficult to handle because it's built around economy rather than power. Take-off rolls are longer, and pitch must be handled more conservatively during climb-outs.

Finally, the Big Boy of them all, the Boeing 747 is the most challenging of the planes to run; rolls and climb-out both are extended, and the plane performs like a real 'heavy'.

All planes' performance features are affected by fuel and passenger load weights. These can be selected by the user, and have alot to do with success or failure in Career Assignment mode. Load up a 747 for a Christmas departure at O'Hare Airport in Chicago with a full complement of fuel and passengers, open up the throttle, and pray. Or try to figure out the least amount of fuel necessary for a given load and a safe, but economical, trip.

Planes can be flown in a number of different modes. Free Flight mode is just that – an option to let the player boot up and just get a feel for the way the planes handle. No choices can be made in terms of load configurations, and there's nothing in the way of air traffic control to deal with.

Single Flight Assignment continues to let the player test out the system, providing options for choice of start and destination, fuel and passenger loads, environmental conditions, airplane choice, and route and navigational aids choice. Air traffic control and communications begin to come into the picture here, and the player can initiate entries in a logbook to create a record of progress with the simulation. Career assignments can also be previewed in this mode.

Finally, Career Assignment provides the whole simulation, and sets the player up for a series of progressive, pre-recorded assignments. It starts with a 737, and the player must follow and succeed with the given flight assignments to progress towards new planes, assignments, and an ever-improving service record. Air traffic control comes into full play here, and navigational abilities, as well as the player's ability to stay within the highly regulated commercial navigational routes assigned for all air transport flight, will be tested to the limit.

A successful pursuit of an entire career ends with the granting of an ATP Certification, proof the player has mastered all the requirements in terms of efficiency, safety and overall airmanship. Players are rated extensively over a number of categories with each flight, and the requirements are strict but certainly not impossible.

It is in the management of the player's career, as well in understanding the requirements of following air traffic control for safe flying, that the heart of **FA:ATP** becomes apparent. Brilliant and difficult to believe at first, SubLogic's computerized air traffic controller (fondly named 'Roger') is with the

pilot throughout the flight (the player is passed off to a series of Rogers, just as in real life; control areas have to be checked into and signed off from in order to stay on-route and fully informed about status).

From the moment the aeroplane starts to roll away from the gate, to the last taxiing off the landing runway to arrival, the player is richly apprised of the many things those guys seemingly lounging up front have to be occupied with during a flight. Take-off and climb rates, circling out of and into airports, coming to assigned altitudes at the right points during the trip, are all simulated in incredible detail. **FA:ATP** even goes so far as to include the morse-code-like identification signals on the PC speaker for navaids as they are tuned in!

Deviation on request

Weather fronts are simulated in the design as well, and storms can come up and require avoidance. The player can request deviations from an assigned course to get around a bad weather system, can request emergency deviations, can execute a missed approach if landing conditions are poor, and can tune in to various types of ATIS frequency to check local conditions. The air traffic control artificial intelligence follows all this closely, and handles the player's responses in a dynamic and thoroughly believable way.

Given the complexity of simulating this kind of computer-responsive output to the player's actions, this is the part of **FA:ATP** where the most glitches appear. They are never really significant enough to ruin the experience, but can sometimes prove annoying, especially when in career mode and just learning how to use the software.

For instance, if the player deviates from course without contacting air traffic control, or if the logic of ATC instructions are not followed enough to actually get on-route, the AI will sometimes start to mess up and provide what seem to be entirely illogical directions.

In some cases, at some airports, the frequencies documented in the manual and those built into the software don't exactly coincide, so tuning in, say, approach control at Kennedy Airport in New York at the frequency marked on the Jeppesen plate won't get you where you need to go.

SubLogic is aware of these bugs, and recent packagings of **FA:ATP** include a newsletter that provides information and work-arounds for the most apparent problems.

So much works compared with those few things that sometimes don't work, though, that I really can't complain.

Serious sim

FA:ATP is an astounding feat of serious simulation programming. It may not prove attractive to the casual gamer looking for a quick fix, or to those looking for the gloss and sheen to show off fast, expensive systems to friends, or to those who look for entertainment software that functions pretty much like the average TV show, as a hypnotic, mind-numbing escape from paying attention to anything.

But for anyone who is interested in learning something about the incredibly complex set of systems that make intercontinental travel fast, efficient and possible, **FA:ATP** is a must. SP

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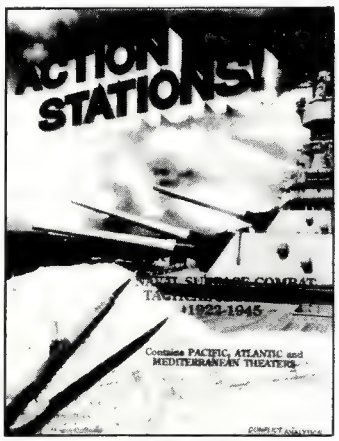

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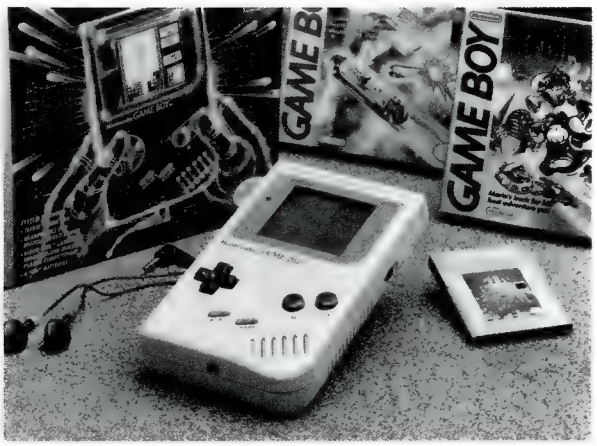

STRATEGY ON THE RUN

Nintendo Gameboy a-go-go with Stuart Mitchell

Today's strategy player can choose from a an amazing array of sophisticated strategy and simulation games. Games such as **Nobunaga's Ambition**, **Ishido**, and **Chessmaster 2000** can keep a person occupied for weeks or months. The only fly in the ointment is that large, rather expensive hardware is required to run these games.

A gamer who travels has a pretty hard time. I first realized how frustrating this could be when I had to suffer through a six-hour lay over recently while making a cross-country business trip. I vowed never to leave my games at home again after that experience. This article explains just how I managed to live up to that brash promise without emptying my bank account.

My first thought was to obtain a portable computer. The rapidly increasing capabilities and falling prices of laptop computers make these machines increasingly viable as alternative gaming platforms. Unfortunately, even at decreased prices, few casual gamers can afford to buy one just so they can take their games on the road.

Waste not

But a much cheaper (and much more compact) option exists – the hand-held cartridge game system. Now before you hurl this otherwise fine and upstanding magazine at the nearest waste receptacle, hear me out. On at least one of the hand-held cartridge game systems, several non-arcade strategy games exist for serious players. Games that not only are comparable with computer strategy games, but are in fact ported over from the computer.

This article focuses on games available for Nintendo's Gameboy hand-held system. There are several other hand-held systems available, but these systems do not offer pure strategy games (yet). The Gameboy, on the other hand, has several types of non-arcade games available for it. For wargame fans there is Koei's **Nobunaga's Ambition**, adapted from the computer game. For computer role-playing fans, **Final Fantasy Legend** offers an Ultima-like experience. Chess players can carry **Chessmaster 2000** with them. Players of more abstract strategy games will find **Ishido**, **Shanghai**, and **Daedalian Opus** to be of interest.

Nobunaga's Ambition for the Gameboy is itself an ambitious undertaking. Koei has managed to capture the essence of the PC game and squeeze it into one small Gameboy cartridge. The cartridge is a marvel of miniaturisation. Inside the tiny (6.5x5.5x0.75 cm) cartridge is 64K RAM, 128K of ROM, and a long-life battery that allows for up to three saved games. The game covers the turbulent years during Japan's civil war period. Powerful warlords vied for supremacy hoping to unite all of feudal Japan under their banner becoming Shogun of the new nation.

Honshu honchos

The PC game covered almost all of Japan including Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku. The Gameboy adaption is considerably smaller, encompassing only the central area of Honshu. Fortunately, this was the primary area of conflict during the civil war. Naturally, the Gameboy version includes fewer samurai and warlords as well. All the various personal characteristics, however, that were included in the PC game are included here, such as IQ, Health, and Charisma.

The economic aspect of the game has been streamlined for the Gameboy as well. As in the original the player invests in land, towns, flood control, and the central castle for each province controlled. In the Gameboy version, it is also necessary to invest in land, towns, flood control, and your castle. New provinces, however, are simply amalgamated into an existing province. There is no management if several provinces required as the territory grows, the holdings are treated as a single entity. The various factors of conquered territories are added to the existing holdings and the borders on the map redrawn. Those used to the PC game may find this disconcerting, but it certainly speeds up play.

All things being unequal

Warfare is handled much like it is in the original game. When an attack is launched, both sides' forces are broken up into five groups which manoeuvre and attack individually. Unlike the PC game, it is not possible to allocate varying strengths to each group. Instead, the Gameboy version allocates strength on an equal basis between the five units. I disliked this more than any other conversion feature because unequal strength allocations was a primary tactical tool in the old game.

Overall, **Nobunaga's Ambition** is a very credible wargame adaption. It plays considerably quicker than its PC ancestor, which is certainly not all bad. I must say that I don't expect it to hold an experienced strategy player's interest as long as the original. On the other hand, as an occasional diversion while on the road, I expect **Nobunaga's Ambition** to provide many hours of pleasant entertainment.

Hit the role, Jack

Final Fantasy Legend does for fantasy role-playing what **Nobunaga's Ambition** did for wargames. FFL is a true role-playing game with no action or arcade elements. In structure and play style, **FFL** resembles **Ultima III** on personal computers. Players create a party of four characters. These characters move about a series of four worlds. The game is played with an overhead perspective. As the party enters special areas such as towns and dungeons, the view zooms in to show a detailed multi-level interior. The various worlds are inhabited by the usual assortment of monsters that must be fought and defeated to gain experience and gold. The towns contain citizens who offer various goods and services as well as the occasional word of advice. Players must complete various sub-quests on each world to get items necessary for passage to the next world. The ultimate goal is achievable only after many, many hours of work. Fortunately, as with **Nobunaga's Ambition**, a save game feature is supported via a built-in battery.

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In many ways **FFL** is even more impressive than **Nobunaga's Ambition**. The game is quite large, probably a bit larger than **Ultima III**. Game play is state-of-the-art fantasy role-playing – circa 1986 or so. Players who miss the straightforward questing nature of older role-playing games (the Phantasie series, the first three Ultimas, the Questron series) will find a lot to like in **FFL**. I found the combat a bit too omnipresent after a while. And the bizarre power shifting of the mutant character class is quite annoying. None the less, **FFL** made many a long plane trip seem like a short commuter journey as I lost myself in the four worlds.

My brain hurts!

One of my favourite Monty Python skits features Michael Palin sporting a knotted hanky and grunting to his doctor: 'My brain hurts!' The Gameboy offers several puzzle games that will have you singing the same refrain. The game that made my brain hurt most was **Ishido**. This is an excellent game to port to the Gameboy. The basic game is simple, the graphics requirements are rudimentary, and play is endlessly fascinating, if frustrating. **Ishido** is played on a board divided into 144 squares (12x12). The object of the game is to play a set of 72 stones to score the most points.

To start the game, six stones are placed on the board by the computer. The other stones are kept in a 'bag'. Each turn players get a new stone at random from the bag. To play a stone, players must place it adjacent to another stone such that either its colour or its pattern match that stone. Placing a stone so that it is adjacent to two stones is worth more points, but requires that the placed stone match colour on one of the stones and the pattern of the other. Three-way and four-way combinations are also possible and worth many more points. They are also considerably harder. **Ishido** is a game that is deceptively deep. As more and more stones are placed on the board, the various patterns and possibilities become dizzyingly complex.

My experience is that players either become totally hooked on **Ishido**, or so overwhelmed that they give it up after a couple of games. I fall somewhat in the middle. When I have the mental stamina for it, I love to play the game. But **Ishido** certainly doesn't work as a quick way to relax.

If a quick, relatively relaxing game is what you seek, grab **Shanghai** and slot it in your Gameboy. **Shanghai** is another port of a highly successful PC product. For those unfamiliar with the original, **Shanghai** is a solitaire game using mah jong tiles. The tiles are laid out in a kind of shallow pyramid. The goal is to select pairs of matching tiles so that eventually the entire pyramid is removed. The twist is that tiles must have an exposed edge to be chosen.

One minor annoyance in the Gameboy version is that I had to scroll back and forth to play the game as the entire pyramid does not fit on the screen. But during play, the pyramid shrinks so that scrolling is no longer necessary. As with **Ishido**, there is more strategy involved than it seems. I, however, never found **Shanghai** to be as mentally exhausting as **Ishido**.

One of the few Gameboy originals that may be of interest to strategy gamers is **Daedalian Opus**. This game is a series of tangram-like puzzles of increasing complexity. The first puzzles are fairly simple involving three pieces which must be turned and moved about to fit inside a pre-defined area. As puzzles are solved, more pieces are added and new pre-defined areas must be filled in.

In spirit **DO** is essentially a portable jigsaw puzzle without the picture. But the complex shapes of each piece and the varying areas create quite a challenge. A timer is provided so that players can compete with each other. I enjoyed **DO**, but found that the puzzles quickly became quite hard to solve. Players with a low frustration level may wish to stay away from this one. Those with a knack for visual puzzles or who like a challenge should give this one a careful look.

Check it out mate

The last game I want to mention is **Chessmaster 2000**. This is a adaption of the original computer chess game. The Gameboy version gives up many of the frills, but retains most of the power of the chess program. I am not a good enough chess player fully to evaluate a game like this. But I did find that I got a good solid game out of the Gameboy opponent, one that was all too ready to pounce on any blunders. The display is a bit cramped, but playable. I suspect that average to better than average players will enjoy having **Chessmaster 2000** along on trips.

There is a surprisingly large selection of decent strategy games for the Gameboy. If you are put off by the relatively feeble technology of the Gameboy, I suggest you wait a year or so to see which of the other hand-held systems begins to offer true strategy games.

If you don't mind a grey-scale screen and want to take your gaming on the road today, give the Gameboy and the cartridges I mentioned above a close look. SF

The contenders

Four hand-held systems are widely available. These systems vary in price, capability, and more importantly in the quantity and quality of software available for them. Below is a summary of the hardware.

Gameboy (Nintendo)

The Gameboy is both the cheapest and least capable of the hand-helds. The Gameboy has an LCD screen which shows four shades of grey. It operates on 4 AA batteries or may be hooked up to an adapter and plugged into the wall.

It runs for about 36 hours on one set of batteries, several times longer than other hand-helds. It uses an 8-bit processor and has fairly limited RAM.

The Gameboy's main redeeming quality is the quantity and quality of software available for it. No other hand-held offers even a single non-arcade game. The Gameboy has several, ranging from historical simulations to abstract puzzlers. I bought a Gameboy solely on the basis of software availability. Prospective buyers should be aware of one main problem: the display. The small screen requires a good pair of eyes and a strong light source. Take a good look at a Gameboy before putting your money down, because some people might not be able to cope with the limited screen visibility.

Lynx (Atari)

The Lynx offers a backlit colour LCD screen and slightly better processing to the Gameboy. It is also slightly larger. A recent price reduction, however, has made it an attractive choice. The Achilles' heel of the Lynx is its lack of software. Unless that situation changes soon, I can't recommend it to anyone.

Game Gear (Sega)

The Game Gear is a new hand-held and software availability is limited, though Sega promises quite a few titles in the next year. And unlike Atari, Sega tends to keep its promises. The Game Gear in other respects is similar to the Lynx – it also sports a colour backlit LCD screen and a higher price than the Gameboy. Of some interest is a TV tuner option which may be attached to the Game Gear to turn it into a portable TV.

Turbo Express (NEC)

The Turbo Express is the Ferrari of hand-helds. First, the Turbo Express contains the internals of the full-size Turbo Grafx cartridge system. This means that the TE plays the same games as its larger brother.

Moreover the TE has the most sophisticated display of any of the hand-helds – a backlit active matrix screen. And a TV tuner option is available.

The sticking points? A hefty price tag and a lack of strategy software. Also, the TE runs through a set of six batteries in about three hours. And NEC has yet to release an adapter for the machine (though one is in the works).

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THE CHOICE IS YOURS...

Or is it? Roger Musson examines the question of player choice

At the Game Developer's Conference in San Jose, California, earlier this year, a debate took place between Chris Crawford and Chris Roberts on the theme of 'good graphics v good gameplay'. Not surprisingly, the support was all for good gameplay. The problem is: what is good gameplay and how, as a designer, do you make it? It is a problem that is not confined to computer games alone.

By taking examples of different strategy games I also intend to show that although the play value of a game is affected by many influences, the main one is the amount of real control that a player has.

Many years ago I wrote an article for one of the board wargaming magazines in which I attempted to account for the continued popularity of the Eastern Front in the Second World War as a topic for wargames.

Fighting for balance

My argument was that, aside from any particular interest one might have in the historical period, the nature of that campaign, in particular the balance of forces and the wide open spaces over which it was fought, lends itself to producing interesting games.

Take an evergreen game like **Panzergruppe Guderian** and immediately all sorts of strategic questions arise: should the German player tackle Smolensk from the north, the south, or head on? For how long should the Russian player attempt to hold on to his front-line positions? The decisions the players make radically affect the play of the game, and gamers can have long arguments in the pub later about which plan works best.

Compare it with any game on, say, a Victorian colonial battle, where the native player has no choice but to attack the British square with all he's got, and the British player has no choice but to stand still and shoot everything that comes at him. (Suggested sequence of play: Fuzzy-wuzzy player movement phase; British player fire phase; Fuzzy-wuzzy player dead fuzzy-wuzzy removal phase; repeat ad nauseam.) The outcome is chiefly influenced by the throw of the dice and minor tactical adjustments by the players, in that order. The result – boredom.

These points are equally applicable to computer wargames. Operation Barbarossa is again a perennial topic, from the early days of the Atari 400 to recent releases such as the ludicrously named **Second Front** from SSI (the Normandy Landings opened the Second Front). And topics like Rorke's Drift still tend to produce tedious games.

But computer games also present problems that are not shared by board strategy games, and it is these I want to look at in more detail.

There are two respects in which computer wargames provide a much superior simulation of real war than conventional wargames, besides the various advantages of instant opponents, no space requirements, and so on. These are the ease with which hidden movement can be implemented, and the use of the computer to provide a realistic chain of command.

Eyes in the sky

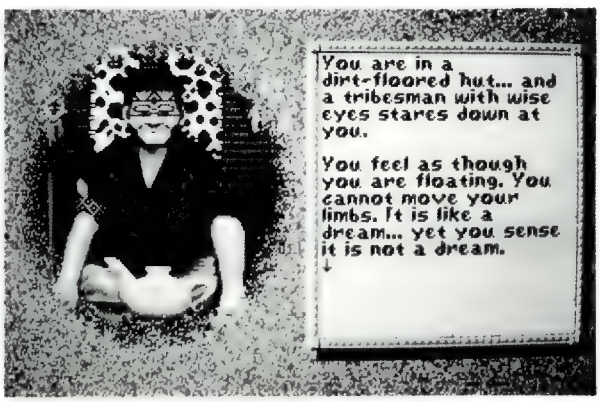
The 'eyeballs in the sky' problem with conventional wargames is a big problem in simulating the command perspective of the original combatants, but inserting what the Americans call limited intelligence is no problem in a computer game, and any computer wargame that doesn't incorporate this deserves to be reformatted. No problem here.

But the other useful thing that a computer wargame can do easily and a board wargame can't do is provide the player with a staff. If you want to play the role of Napoleon at Austerlitz, you want to be making the same sort of decisions as Napoleon made, not the sort of decisions that his corporals made. Where and when to attack are the deliberations of the general; which regiments form square and when, are decisions for much further down the command structure. In a conventional wargame you have to make all the decisions down to individual unit placings yourself, thus losing any sense of focus on the highest command position. But a computer wargame can provide the player with a staff of obliging subordinates who will do all the dirty work and let you get on with your dreams of *la gloire*.

The best example of this approach working successfully is the SSG game **Carriers at War**, where the player makes the admiral-level decisions about when and where to send out a strike, and leaves the staff-officer-work of ordering the arming and readying of individual aeroplanes to the computer.

But this approach can be carried too far. In the long-running series of SSG battle games, of which the **Decisive Battles of the American Civil War** series is perhaps the best known, the player is cast firmly in the role of commander-in-chief; he influences the battle principally by giving orders to his subordinate generals – who have minds of their own, and may or may not oblige their chief with prompt execution of his orders.

Now, I have a lot of sympathy with this design philosophy, because it's realistic. On the other hand, what tends to happen is that the player develops the sensation that nothing that he does has any real effect on the battle, and that he is as likely to win sitting on his hands doing nothing as


You are in a dirt-floored hut... and a tribesman with wise eyes stares down at you.
You feel as though you are floating. You cannot move your limbs. It is like a dream... yet you sense it is not a dream.

Savage Empire: first rate graphics, and a plot that has story-line like features

he is attempting to rush round the battlefield ordering his commanders about. It can be argued that this is accurate; that the historical commanders also must have experienced frustration at not being able to influence the course of the battle as minutely as they would like.

At least the commanders, however, had the battle running according to their plan in the first place. It was the commander-in-chief who decided how to deploy the army for the battle, and what the initial orders should be. The problem with the scenarios in **Decisive Battles** is that the player takes over after the initial deployment and planning has been done, and therefore after his main opportunity to influence the course of the battle has passed.

Contrast this with **Encylopaedia of War: Ancient Battles** from CCS. Again, once the battle has started, all the player can do is rush his general round to the point where his presence inspiring the troops will do the most good, and decide when to order in the reserve. He faces the same command limitations as Alexander or Scipio faced. But at least the player usually gets to decide how to deploy his troops at the start of the battle, and which lines to launch into the attack at which moment. It is the decisions made in deploying the troops at the start of the game that will influence the outcome of the battle more than anything else.

Decisive experiment

As an experiment I used the scenario designer in **Decisive Battles** to create a battle in which none of the subordinate commanders had any preset orders at the beginning of the game, so that the first thing the player would do was decide which objectives each corps should go for and give orders accordingly. It took forever for any units to actually move, demonstrating how unresponsive the **Decisive Battles** game system is. The player can only watch.

Similar criticisms, though perhaps with less force, could be levelled at the overrated series of games from Peter Turcan (**Borodino, Austerlitz,** and **Waterloo**), where the lack of information, while historically accurate, leads to even more frustration for the player. Again, the initial deployment has all been set up in advance, so the player gets the frustrating part of being a general without getting to do the bit that Napoleon really shone at – the planning in the tent the night before.

However, the Turcan series is hampered by a control interface that appears to have escaped from an early ZX Spectrum text adventure – 16-bit technology it isn't. The game system cries out for a point and click, pull-down menus interface, but no, the series drags tediously on with each new game being one more battle in the same old style.

Fiery desire

As land battle games go, I think **Fire Brigade** from Panther Games does best at implementing a chain of command while at least giving the player the feel that the decisions he makes are affecting the outcome. And the feel is perhaps the important thing – an illusion is acceptable if it is convincing.

One of the areas in which many computer wargames fail is in being complex without looking complex. In a board wargame of the more complex sort, every time you conduct a combat you have to look up so many modifiers, which takes so long that you have your nose well rubbed into the detail of the design. How much easier it is to let the computer do all the work – except that if it does it all internally in the twinkling of an eye, the result looks just as bland as if the computer had just made one unmodified die-roll.

This can avoided if at least you give the player little messages to let him know what a complex computation the program is slogging its way through.

What is a shame is the absence (so far as I know) of a decent game using computer-controlled subordinates at an operational scale instead of a tactical scale. In other words, a game covering, say, the whole of Napoleon's Leipzig campaign in 1813, with the player taking the part of Napoleon and having to try to co-ordinate his marshals to get them all to reach the battlefield at the same time.

Role on more choice

But while I have been discussing only computer wargames so far, these are not the only strategy games where choice is an issue. The same is also true of computer role-playing games (CRPGs), and to a lesser extent, the traditional adventure games from which they are to some extent descended.

Consider the case of the text adventure first. Usually there are a number of problems to be solved before the game can be completed. The question is, to what extent do these problems have to be solved in order (linear development) or not (free development). There are games where the player must solve each problem before he can go on to the next; others in which the player may have a choice of blocked routes to work at clearing to access deeper parts of the adventure. And I would say that the latter are superior; if you are stuck by one puzzle you can turn your attention to another and come back to the sticky one some other time with fresh ideas. But in a linear adventure, once you're stuck, you're stuck.

Consider one of the Scott Adams' early text adventures, which started with a text along the lines of 'you are tied hand and foot to a chair and are quite unable to move'. I recall at the time that reviewers praised the daring, the panache, of this unconventional opening. But the poor player who cannot see the solution can progress not one step into the adventure!

Issuing forth

This issue is more important in a CRPG, since an important feature of the game is to what extent it succeeds at generating some sort of atmosphere and identification with the character. Now, it is often pointed out, with perfect truth, that CRPGs are not true role-playing games at all, because in a game like **Dungeons & Dragons**, if a player chooses some utterly bizarre scheme of action, he is quite at liberty to try it, and it may even work if the games master is feeling kind. In a CRPG if an action doesn't fit in with a few predetermined commands available to the player, it may not be performed. This makes it all the more essential for the game designer to maximise what limited choice the player does have, and not trap him in a linear plot where problems must be solved, and opponents fought, in the right sequence.

It is worth mentioning at this point that linear plots are bad for conventional RPGs as well – trying to railroad players into a particular adventure where they have no control over what happens at each step of the game will not result in happy players. This can be illustrated by comparing **Faery Tale Adventure** and the recent **Champions of Krynn**. In the former, the player starts off in the usual sort of situation – the world is in dire straits, evil lords have perverted nature and monsters roam the land, sea and so on. Only the player can set

Decisive Battles: realistic design philosophy leaves the player as a spectator

things to right, but he hasn't a clue how. There the character is, leaving home with nothing more than a dagger and an apple, and the world is *big*. Exploration gradually reveals more and more of the plot, and the tasks the character is expected to perform. Except in the endgame, the player usually has complete freedom of where to explore next, which castle to investigate, and which problem to try to puzzle out.

In **Champions of Krynn** the plot is much more detailed and novel-like, at the cost of the player being forced to follow this plot each step of the way. The player is given one mission at a time as the plot develops, and woe betide him if he tries to deviate. Try, for instance, an expedition to Kernen before it is called for by the plot, and the program ruthlessly punishes the player by killing his characters with a huge army of red dragons.

There is no exploring the land of Krynn – the map is one screen only (compare this with **Faery Tale Adventure** where the map is hundreds of screens in size) and almost irrelevant to the game play. Clicking on a box marked 'go to Throtl' would be just as effective as manoeuvring the party of characters all of two cursor positions to reach that town.

Puzzling point

Another feature of **Champions of Krynn** is the complete absence of problems to solve, other than a few trivial ones. To complete the game, all the characters need to do is fight and beat all the foes in the order that they are presented.

Champions of Krynn has its merits, chiefly the effective combat and magic system, based on the **AD&D** rules. If only SSI would drop its commitment to detailed plots reminiscent of third-rate fantasy novels, and bolt its tactical system on to a big wilderness with a few dungeons to discover and towns to explore, the company would have a critical winner as well as a commercial winner on its hands.

I shall now make an extreme comparison and come up with what I expect will be an unpopular judgment.

Take a geriatric game like **Ultima III** and pit it against **Dungeon Master** – I would say the former is actually the better game. It may seem like heresy to criticise **Dungeon Master**, but I still maintain the game is overrated on account of its graphic excellence.

Seductive images

Certainly **Dungeon Master** has much about it that is seductive. The clever use of graphics makes it very atmospheric – almost scarily so. The point-and-click interface for moving objects about is also well handled, and the slickness and quality of the front end quickly creates a favourable impression.

But my big complaint about it is its linearity. For the most part the dungeon is just one long corridor that twists and turns and leads the player from one monster or trap to the next, so that if he gets stuck at one place, there isn't anywhere else he can try to make progress. There is problem-solving and fighting, but no decision-making.

A player never reaches a point of deciding 'now the characters need to go back home to re-equip' or 'now is the time to explore that corridor I previously left alone'.

By comparison, the graphics in **Ultima III** (yes, I know I could mention a later adventure in the saga where the graphics are better, but I'm choosing part III deliberately) are crude and blocky. The first-person views of the dungeon corridors, a subject directly comparable with **Dungeon Master**, are hardly more advanced than those in **3D Monster Maze** on the ZX81. The control interface is extremely clunky compared with that of **Dungeon Master**, yet I consider the game play to be much more satisfying.

Rather than dumping the characters at the dungeon door and telling the player to get on with it, as in **Dungeon Master**, the player must explore the world to find the dungeons first, and then plan which one to explore, how deep to go at a time, when to leave, when to look for something else, while all the time trying to solve the overriding problem of ridding the world of the evil demon Exodus. (The sequel, **Leviticus**, doesn't seem to have appeared yet ...) Perhaps I'm a purist, but I find this ultimately more satisfying.

Of course, what one would like best is graphics *and* gameplay, and some more recent games that take advantage of more powerful machines, manage to do this.

Savage Empire, for instance, has first-rate graphics, a mouse interface very similar to that of **Dungeon Master**, and an **Ultima**-like environment to explore. In fact, **Savage Empire** is an excellent example of how to construct a CRPG with a plot that has story-line like features, yet does not bludgeon the player into a linear sequence the way that **Champions of Krynn**, or some of the other SSI games such as **Curse of the Azure Bonds** do.

The trend towards more powerful machines as the standard (1Mb Amigas, VGA 286/386 PCs) makes it easier to have good graphics and still have enough memory left for a good game as well. But the ability to use powerful hardware is no advantage if the game designer doesn't really know what makes a good game in the first place.

Supreme beings

To some extent this must be a matter of taste – evidently some people seem even to enjoy games like **Supremacy**, where a player needs to be able to make mouse clicks at a speed that would stand him in good stead in the fastest arcade shoot-'em-up.

But I like to think that there are at least a few eternal verities in game design, and I rest my case here that the virtue of providing real decision-making opportunities for the player happens to be one of them. SP

Fire Brigade: implements a chain of command yet lets the player feel he has a hand in the outcome

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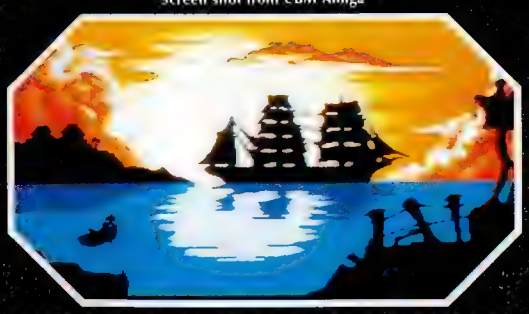

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CHICAGO CES

CES is the high-tech industry's window to the world. But as far as leisure software goes, the feeling was that whatever was on display would be, if not exactly second-hand goods, offerings with a shop-soiled look about them. Such pessimistic pre-show analysis was based on the number of products paraded at the winter equivalent in Las Vegas that have yet to emerge. But pessimists, whadda they know? asks Brian Walker

The name Chicago still conjures up images of blues and gangsters. More recently it has acquired a new tag, that of the United States' most modern city. The magnificent architecture that reaches for the sky makes this a hard claim to dispute.

Strolling down Lake Shore Drive, alongside Lake Michigan, the visitor eventually comes to another colossal structure, an edifice by the name of McCormick Place. This building is a cantilevered high-tech palace draped in matt black – and what better location could there be to host the annual summer Consumer Electronic Show?

Access

The first company to contradict the impression that it had been out to lunch since January was Access, producer of the incredible golf game **Links**. Its new Bay Hill course disk is now available and will soon be followed by Pinehurst, North Carolina.

The first quarter of next year will see the release of **Links 2**. Exactly what this will include has not yet been decided but options under consideration are a sound editor, female golfers, and a stats database. Access is also considering a course designer and is looking for feedback from users on this. The latest upgrade for **Links** is 1.45, by the way.

Access was the first company to take the pictorial high road and produce games in VGA only. This restriction also applies to its new adventure game **Martian Memorandum** which is described as a 'true multi-media entertainment', a claim that verges on reality on seeing the game itself.

Access claims that **MM** will also feature full motion video (FMV), the first game to do so. And yes, it is a *form* of FMV.

By the standard of computer graphics it is terrific; by TV standards, the resolution is still basic. But let's not quibble; this game is a barrier breaker.

In it, players will be able to interact with the lifelike characters, and it quickly becomes apparent why more and more software houses are employing actors. The plot revolves around the exploits of Tex Murphy and his journey into space circa 2039. Access says the humour will have players 'chuckling all the way to Mars'.

Martian Memorandum will have an on-line help facility to assist players new to the adventure genre. The game will ship in August on six high density disks or nine low density disks. Anyone without a hard drive, prepare to flop out.

Don't titter, missus: Les Manley is Lost in LA (top). On the right tack: Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus (bottom)

Accolade

He searched for the king. He altered his destiny. And now he's **Lost in LA**. Yes, we are talking about Les Manley, Accolade's hapless adventuring hero. In this latest saga, Les is invited by his old buddy, Helmut Bean (the world's smallest man) to Tinseltown for a visit. No sooner has he arrived than the mighty midget and his bosom(y) friend LaFonda Turner(!) have become the latest victims in a string of designer kidnappings.

While attempting to solve the crimes, Les bumps into all manner of LA wildlife, from Lance the Lifeguard to a pair of female mud wrestlers. Although featuring the same engine as the other games in the series, **Lost in LA** will feature a new point and click interface. The game will also contain a new scrolling feature that provides an uninterrupted view of Los Angles as Les walks from screen to screen. The soundtrack will feature music (specially licensed) from archetypal LA groups such as The Beach Boys.

When the blurb for another Accolade game starts off 'Rescue Elvira from the clutches of a diabolical Netherworld beast', the immediate response is: why? let the wretched old bag suffer. Those who take a different view may care to check out **Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus**. The game begins at studio of Black Widow Productions where Elvira is working on her latest cinematic 'masterpiece'. Or at least she would be had she not (un)fortunately disappeared.

Before you can say 'Lord Lucan', a ghostly image appears advising that the Queen of Tack has been captured by an evil force with poor eyesight. The said evil force is holding Elvira prisoner in one of the three studios' sound stages each of which depicts a creepy locale. The player must decide which one of these to enter.

As players confront and communicate with the creatures in the game, they can track the effect each activity has on their stats and all their physical well being with the help of an outline of a body which pinpoints six key areas, each able to endure a certain number of hits. As the player is attacked, the outline converts, step-by-step into a skeleton. When the outline changes to a complete skeleton, er, you're dead. Player's primary stats include hit points, power points, and experience level. Secondary stats track such characteristics as strength,

fire and poison resistance, and intelligence. **Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus** will be available for the IBM and Amiga in October.

Accolade built its reputation on sports games, though curiously never very much on the gridiron game. Until now that is – enter **Mike Dikta Football**. Dikta was a Hall of Fame tight end during his playing days and since then has established a formidable reputation as coach of the Superbowl-winning Chicago Bears. This is an NFL game where the objective is to reach the Superbowl by way of a grinding 17-week schedule.

Twenty-eight teams are featured, as is a team construction facility that enables the 'coach' to change the name, number and vital statistics of each player, as well as allowing a play-making facility. Any plays designed therein, or the 80 predesigned plays, may be called up and practised in the Practice Drills option.

Mike Dikta Football will feature 256-colour VGA graphics, digitized sound and multi-angle player perspectives. It will be available for the IBM in October.

Update: **Conspiracy: The Deadlock Files** will be released in August.

Brøderbund

At Brøderbund it was back to grass roots time, a philosophy epitomized by Chris Crawford's eagerly awaited wargame **Patton Strikes Back**. First impressions are that this is going be the definitive 'Bulge' game. The map graphics are excellent and emphasise the redundant nature of hex grids (are you listening SSI?). The game runs in real time and, as you may have gleaned from the last sentence, features area movement.

The version I saw was on the Mac with its quintessential pull-down menus, but the PC version should not differ greatly. The look of the game was resolutely modern, indeed almost radical. Digitized screens, point and click command interface, and the on-screen bulletins, all served to reinforce this view. The player can of command either German or Allied forces under historically accurate tactical and weather conditions.

Units are somewhat curiously depicted as arrows rather than the familiar military icons. Information about these units can be garnered by pointing and clicking. The graphics (on the PC) will be in high resolution VGA, and the AdLib soundcard will be supported.

Chris will be writing a background piece on the game in the next issue of *Strategy Plus*.

A Brøderbund Mac classic, **Playmaker Football**, is due out on the PC very soon. This has acquired a good reputation but the graphics I saw suggested that the game might be showing its age. In the light of **Joe Montana Football** and **Monday Night Football**, football games that depict players as blobs just don't make it to the end zone.

For anyone who isn't too fussed about graphics, though, **Playmaker Football** does have a few things going for it. The first adjustment that needs to be made is to realize that it is a strategy game with an American Football theme imposed on it. It is *not* a simulation despite the input of 49ers defensive coach Bill McPherson. The game's best features are the play-making facility and (outstandingly) the artificial intelligence that the player can program.

Update: **The Ancient Art of War in the Skies** is now scheduled for a September release.

California Dreams

At the winter CES in Las Vegas, this small but perfectly interesting company had one of the most original games of the show in **Solidarity**. The latest on this is that it is scheduled for an October revolutionary release.

Clocking in round about the same time will be **Wreck Hunters** (working title). This is described as an 'interactive role-playing adventure', but what isn't these days? Leaving aside hackneyed blurb, the game does sound promising. The player commands a crew of five in a high-tech sub. The objective is to locate enough loot under the water to pay off debt above water. If or when the treasure is acquired it must be fenced out to greedy art galleries and reclusive millionaires. The player will be able to explore 250 historical and recent shipwrecks – some in 3D – and read their manifests.

Not everything, however, is romance and rum. Lurking in the deeps is Evil Eddie and his fleet of mini-subs. All in all this is a deep-sounding, interactive, role-playing strategy adventure action game.

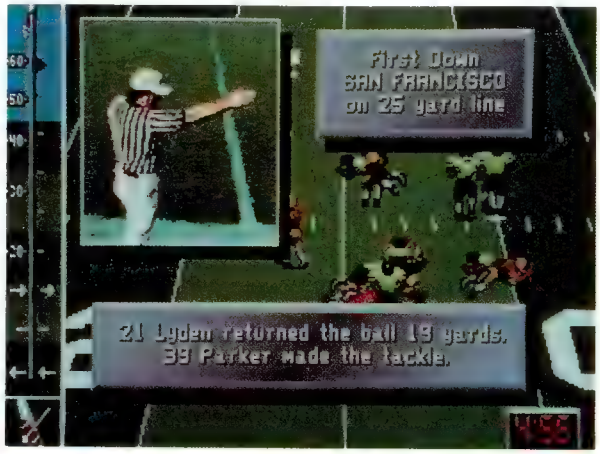
EA

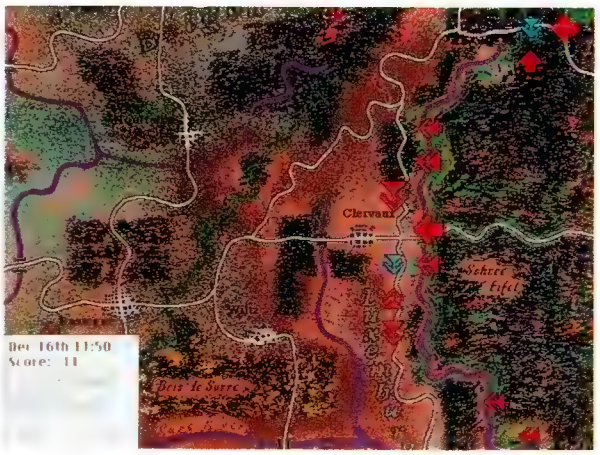
For me the star of the show was Eddie Dombrower, the enthusiastic and dapper little genius behind **Earl Weaver Baseball II**, arguably the game of the show.

Even if you think baseball is just rounders played in pyjamas this is a game that demands to be seen and should be regarded as the sports games against which all others are judged. When played in purely 'action' mode this game makes mincemeat of the opposition, but when played as a statistical sim it defines the state of the art.

Electronic Arts is referring to the program as the **Earl Weaver Baseball II** *system* on account of the **Commissioners Disk II** and the **1990 MLBPA Player Statistics & Managers Profiles Disk**, both available as optional extras.

A complete roster of the game's features would just about fill this issue, so briefly they include: TV style camera coverage with the number of frames of animation comparing favourably with that in motion picture movies; digitized sounds when the ball is whacked and when the umpire makes a call; a facility where *weekly* stats can be downloaded from the STATS Inc bulletin board directly into the program, meaning that players will be able to play using the most current information possible; a fast action mode for replay gamers that permits matches to be resolved in less than a minute – this can also be stopped at, say, the end of the 7th, and the match played out in 'normal'

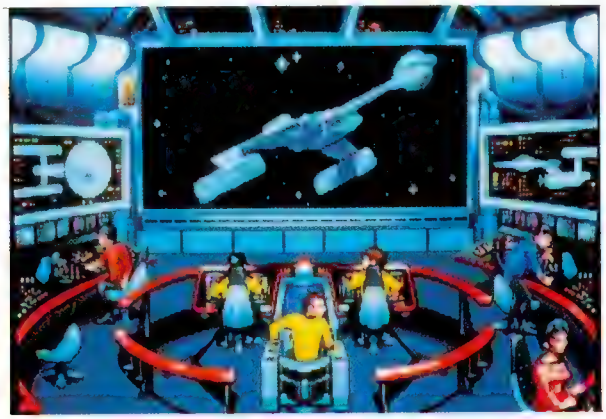




Bearing up: Accolade's Mike Dikta Football (top). Brøderbund's definitive Bulge: Patton Strikes Back (bottom)

mode; 50 different hitter/fielder ratings for each player; 30 separate pitcher ratings; a stadium construction program; instant replays and slow motion; box scores with a batter-by-batter breakdown; print option for all text screens.

The really great news is that **Earl Weaver II** will be released in the UK in July. My efforts to persuade Eddie to produce a cricket game along similar lines elicited an unexpected response. 'Yeah, I saw the game when I was at Oxford,' he intoned, 'but where can you sell a cricket game?'



Star Trek: showing enterprise (top). Koei's Chinese affair continues with Romance of the Three Kingdoms II (bottom)

True, so let's just hope that a few boatloads of IBMs get washed up on a Caribbean beach, or failing that, the Indian subcontinent becomes a dumping ground for expired Amstrads.

It's unlikely that the **Black Crypt** has witnessed many games of cricket. For this is the former residence of the dark lord Estoroth. His fate was sealed by four mighty guardians. When they locked the door, however, they forgot the key and unfortunately sealed themselves in.

Inevitably, the evil of the dark lord begins to manifest itself once more. The player's task is to lock him up for good – and to remember to take the key. **Black Crypt** is a fully animated adventure with a unique twist to the Point-of-View perspective, enhanced to take advantage of the Amiga's special capabilities (such as 64 colours and extra half-brite animated images). Available in September for 1Mb Amigas only.

Update: **Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge** and **Chuck Yeager's Air Combat** should be available as you read this.

Interplay

The old adage about all the work in licences going into the acquisition rather than the game has never been so apt as when applied to *Star Trek*. This sad state of affairs looks to change now that Interplay is showing some enterprise. **Star Trek: The 25th Anniversary** combines a realistic, 3D space flight simulator with that of a role-playing adventure. Players will be able to pilot the famous starship using digitized model graphics. They will also have full control of phasers, photon torpedoes, and warp drives. But the costumes, what about the costumes?

Beaming your way in August, **Star Trek** will also feature 256-colour VGA graphics, 3D digitized space conflict scenes, a complete musical score with digitized sound from the series, and a point and click interface. Plus, of course, mini-skirts and dodgy toupees.

The **Bards Tale Construction Kit** is unlikely to include any mini-skirts. It does, however, enable the user to design a dungeon and monsters to put in that dungeon. Indeed just about everything you have ever seen in a dungeon can be created with this new program. One mini-adventure is included with the package which will also feature full VGA graphics, digitized sound, and actual dungeons from **Bard's Tale I** together with a ready to play mini-dungeon. Available in September for the IBM.

Also winging its way towards you that month will be **The Lord of the Rings Volume II: The Two Towers,** which takes off where **Vol I** left off. The combat system from the original is retained despite receiving some stick.

'The reaction was split 50/50,' said an Interplay spokesperson, 'so we decided to keep it.'

Update: 'Game of the Show' in Las Vegas, **Castles** should now be available.

Interstel

Nothing much has been heard from this company of late, but that is about to change with the release of **Armada 2525**, a multi-player space strategy game. Five players (computers too) command a powerful armada of warships in an interstellar battle to control the galaxy. Six star classes, five classes of planets, individual computer player personalities, four levels of diplomacy and eight technologies round out this product from wargame designer RT Smith (see **Arnhem** review in *Strategy Plus* 8). The IBM version should be available in July with the Amiga one to follow shortly afterwards.

Interstel also plans to release a series of wargames, commencing shortly with **Utah Beach**. This focuses on the battle of Cherbourg and will emphasise historical accuracy. Air, naval and engineer support will all be all available to the player. Other features include a path planner which plots movement for units based on terrain and mobility. Interstel is keen to stress the ease of the interface which 'lets the player concentrate on strategy rather than on game mechanics'. The Mac version will be first, followed shortly afterwards by the IBM.

Koei

Lots of surprises on the Koei stand, not least the appearance of **L'Empereur**. This is the company's first strategy game to focus on Western civilization rather then the Orient (Preview, pages 42–3).

Out of the blue, as it were, comes **Uncharted Waters**, a game in the tradition of Microprose's **Pirates**. Koei describes this as its 'first role-playing adventure'. In truth all the company's games have often contained more elements of role-playing than others that trumpet the fact. **Uncharted Waters** is set in the 16th century, shortly after Spain's defeat of the Ottoman Empire. The player lives the life of Reilly as he traverses the great oceans in search of treasure and a bit of nookie. Like all Koei games, good resource management is essential to success.

The European release dates of Koei games are difficult to predict because of the whims of UK distributor Infogrames. What is certain, however, is that the next game to be released will be **Romance of the Three Kingdoms II**. This will be available in the US in September for the IBM, with **L'Empereur** following a month later. October should see the release of Koei's American revolution game **Liberty or Death**. All the IBM games will be in EGA only though they will now support the AdLib soundboard. Amiga versions should follow about a year later.

Konami

This huge Japanese company is best known for its arcade games so it's something of a welcome surprise to see Konami tackling role-playing. Altogether the company will be releasing three such games. Probably the most notable is **Champions**, based on the pen-and-paper game published by Hero Games. Reassuringly, the original design team was also responsible for the software version.

The character generation system places this game apart from most others of the genre: a superhero's special powers and abilities may be customized. Even the costumes may be designed according to the player's whim.

Konami has also picked up the ball which other companies were forced to drop. Both Spinnaker and Cinemaware have recently gone to the wall taking with them some potentially excellent games. Thankfully they are not lost for ever: **Rollerbabes** (*Strategy Plus* 6) is now back on course and set for an October (IBM) release. Joining it in the resurrection stakes will be Tolkien's **Riders of Rohan** which, despite the adventure related theme, will be more of a strategy game.

The television series *Mission: Impossible* has spawned a game called, would you believe, **Mission: Impossible**. The player's task is to guide the team through San Francisco in an effort to discover who is behind a series of fatal accidents that are befalling the city's leading political figures. All the Konami games will be initially be released for the IBM.

Linel

Switzerland may be known for many things, even though the only one that springs readily to mind are the country's 'flexible' banking facilities. Perhaps these were the basis for Linel's new game **Traders** which, if the plot synopsis and screen shots are anything to go by, sounds like a real winner, especially for any **M.U.L.E.** fan. Linel openly acknowledges the influence of that seminal multi-player game, for **Traders** is also a multi-player game (up to four, all of whom may play at once using a special joystick adapter).

The trading part of the game is fairly standard: adjust prices to the point where they become attractive to buyers. Things start to get strange with the purchase of rockets. These travel to other planets to gather snails which can be traded like other goods. But they are usually given to 'Fat Mike' so that he can pay the rent (don't even ask).

If trading snails is not your thing then you can always use them as chips in the local casino. If you tire of snails *and* trading then there is always the military option. This is a sub-game featuring robots that must be equipped from a shop on the local high street; a sort of high-tech Woolies.

Traders will be available on all formats 'soon'. For a demo, see our free disk offer on page 63.

In a more serious vein, Linel is set

Med matters: Lords of the Sea (top). Still monkeying around: LeChuck's Revenge (middle). Indyscribable: Lucasfilms' Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis (bottom)

to release **Lords of the Sea: 1000 BC**. This is a real-time strategy game set in the Mediterranean sea, long, long, ago. Trading features heavily, though there is no sign of any snails. The main aspect of the game is military conquest. The action takes place on a 320x200 map of the Med which can be scrolled every which way. There are also optional arcade sequences featuring catapults and chariot racing. Modem play is also possible. **Lords of the Sea** will be available on all formats shortly.

Lucasfilms

Former inhabitants of Monkey Island will be delighted to hear that **Monkey Island II: LeChuck's Revenge** is on its way. Having apparently destroyed the evil ghost pirate LeChuck at the end of **The Secret of Monkey Island**, Guybrush learns a thing or three about ghost disposal, for the old sea dog is back, alive and thoroughly pissed off.

'One of my goals in the design of **LeChuck's Revenge** was to create a game that was as non-linear as possible,' said project leader Ron Gilbert. 'Players like to have many paths open to them at all times,' he continued. One of the main differences in this game is that it can be played at three different skill levels, each of which will determine which direction the adventure proceeds in.

LeChuck's Revenge will be available for the IBM in October and for the Amiga and ST next spring.

Another sequel due in October will be **Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis,** which Lucasfilms describes as the 'most complex game it has ever published'. The game features 200 rooms, and Lucasfilms' artists rendered more than 100 pieces of original art; video rotoscoping allowed the characters to move in a realistic manner.

Like **LeChuck's** revenge the story line is non-linear. Players will be lead down the path, or rather one of three, each of which will adapt to and reflect the player's style. Many of the puzzles presented have different solutions, and some change from game to game.

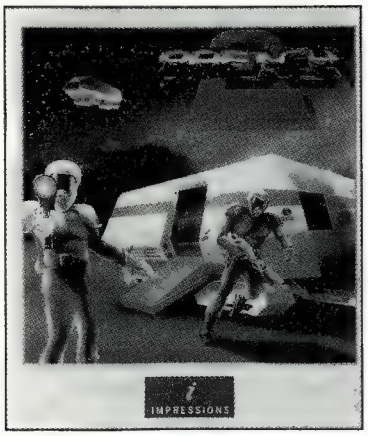
The plot features the nasty Nazis again – what a wacky lot they were – and some nonsense about saving civilization. All in all, a right larf.

Maxis

Microprose is often referred to as 'the home of sims', but Maxis looks to be taking over that title. First the city, then the earth, and now ants. Ants? **Sim Ant** is the latest creation to emerge from the fertile imagination of Will Wright, and like all his other games, it carries the indelible stamp of originality. This is an icon-driven brigade-level game that features plenty of tactical combat. Battles must be fought so that the war may be won. The battlefield is the back garden.

The objective is the capture and invasion of the house adjoining it. The enemy is the owner-occupier, who gets increasingly nervous as the insect infantry approach. Weapons include lawn-mowers and pesticides. Before taking him on, however, fellow ants must be defeated. Units available to the player include soldiers, workers, and breeders. The combat system takes terrain into ac-

Your First Impression



BREACH 2

- Nominated for strategy game of the year 1990 (STRATEGY PLUS)
- "A welcome breath of fresh air" (five stars out of five; PC Leisure)
- "A thoroughly absorbing close combat simulation" (ACE); "hugely enjoyable" (ST Format); "a superb product…it's just so addictive!" (Your Amiga)
- Omnitrend's Breach 2 is a detailed science fiction combat simulation, where you command a squad of marines through different missions. A true classic.

IBM PC, ST & AMIGA £25.53

MERCHANT COLONY

- A huge game of colonisation, industrial development, trading and warfare set in the Eighteenth Century
- Buy ships, hire soldiers and explorers, and send ships sailing around the world to set up new colonies. Explore the new territory, discover minerals or natural produce, and build factories to produce goods. Then ship these goods around the world, to obtain the best prices!
- Along the way you'll encounter pirates, battles with other colonial powers, native uprisings, and numerous natural hazards.
- "A strategy game with decent game play…excellent graphics…considerable depth and a style all of its own" (84% ST Format June 1991)

ST & AMIGA £29.99

BLITZKRIEG MAY 1940

- Ken Wright's most sophisticated WW2 game ever
- 2 different games — command either the Allied defence or the German Offensive
- "A hard, tough, thought provoking wargame with enough explosive play to make even the most hardened tabletop games sit up and take notice"

(Games Gazette)

- Historically accurate

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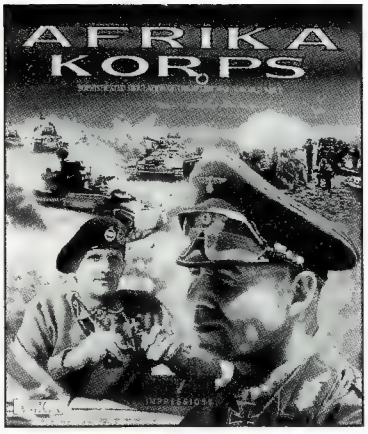

AFRIKA KORPS

- Just released, this is the sequel to Ken Wright's highly successful Blitzkrieg May 1940
- Simulates the desert campaigns of WW2
- Play either side — Rommel or Montgomery
- Features option for delegation of command to unit commanders
- Superbly presented with detailed historical background booklet & instructions

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C O M I N

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- 2-player option
- huge play area
- wide variety of troop types
- play either side
- option "fog of war" & command time-lag

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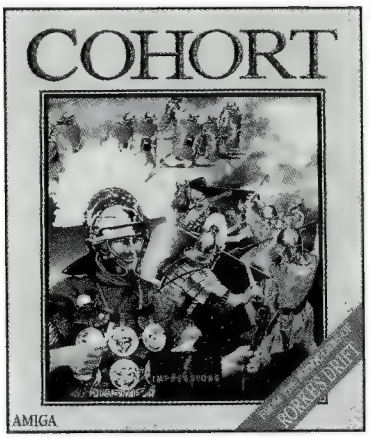

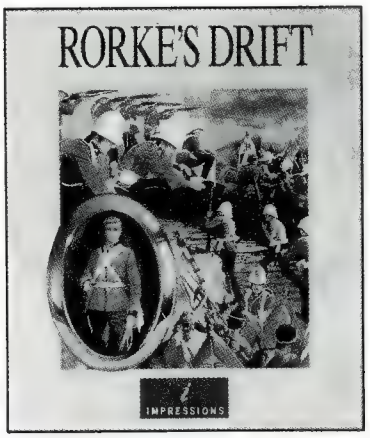

COHORT—FIGHTING FOR ROME

- "While Cohort has plenty of historical detail, its colourful graphics, entertaining animation, imaginative use of sound and flexible icon controls are what really makes it." (890 ACE June)
- "Very effective" (85% ZERO June 1991)
- "If you like Rorke's drift, you'll certainly like COHORT" (Strategy Plus June 1991)
- COHORT is the second game in Impressions' unique and extremely popular miniature-style war-game series
- Enhancements include group command functions, sound, multiple scenarios, user-definable armies, and more

OUT NOW ON ST, AMIGA & IBM PC
£29.99

RORKE'S DRIFT

- This war-game faithfully re-creates the classic defence by a small unit of Welsh soldiers against an onslaught by 4000 Zulu warriors!
- This unique "miniature-style" computer war-game lets you control each man individually, in a bid to hold off against the Zulus against all odds.
- Phenomenally successful, Rorke's Drift is your chance to make history!
- "Incredibly playable" (CU Amiga); "The graphics & presentation are very slick" (ACE)

IBM PC, ST & AMIGA £25.53

THE FINAL CONFLICT

- A frighteningly topical simulation of power politics and global warfare. The Final Conflict gives you command of an allied force just as a major world war has broken out.
- Command tanks, infantry and navies to defeat your opponent; use diplomacy; manage your home resources; send out spies; and be prepared to launch nuclear missiles if it should come to it.
- "Like an advanced computer version of the classic board game RISK...worth checking out if you fancy your chances at world domination" (CU Amiga)
- "One of the best strategy games around" Gen D'Or 90% (Generation 4)

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G S O O N

ARGE OF T BRIGADE

- Battle options include: The Thin Red Line, The Charge of the Light Brigade, and more!! *....or the whole battle*

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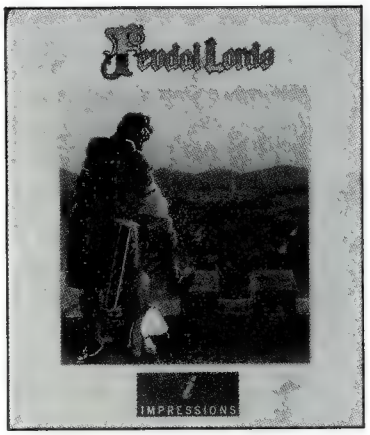

FEUDAL LORDS

- A medieval game of treachery, greed, tactics and strategic combat!
- Play against the computer or up to 3 friends in a bid to rule the mythical land
- 3 types of troops; 3 types of battle (one interactive); seasons; sophisticated economy; alliances, mercenaries, assassins, plots, migration, investments, and lots more!
- Computer opponent developed over 3 years designed to be a REAL challenge!
- Icon driven for ease of use; beautiful graphics & atmospheric sounds throughout

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Might and Magic III: Isle of Terra: soon available

count but it is generally the case that he who arrives firstest with the mostest will prevail.

This unique game is '80% finished' according to Maxis's Jeff Braun, 'though if we decide to introduce some new elements that figure go could go back to 50%,' he continued.

Will is, of course, the archetypal Mac programmer which means that other computers take a back seat. In this instance, though, the PC version is being programmed simultaneously. **Sim Ant** will be released in the UK by Ocean Software.

Sid Meier's Civilization (below). In space, no one can hear synthesized speech: Wing Commander II: Vengeance of the Kilrathi (bottom)

Microprose

At the Big M the air was rich with promises, most of which are likely to be fulfilled sooner, rather than later. Many of the games on display have been previewed in this magazine at one time or another, the exception being **Codename: White Shadow**. This is set in the year 2001. The USA is under attack (again), this time by the drug cartels. The player's task is to get high in an F-22 and wipe out the pusher's palace in a high-tech aerial assault.

Combat sequences will be displayed in full 3D graphics, with detailed images of drug plantations, factories, warehouses, and the imaginations of games designers (these will be very small). **Codename: White Shadow** will be available for the IBM and Amiga in October.

Updates: **Gunship 2000**, out now; **F-117A Stealth Fighter 2.0**, out now; **Civilization**, October; **Darklands**, April '92.

Mindcraft

One of my favourite strategy games is **Breach 2**, published in the UK by Impressions but programmed in the US by Mindcraft and Omnitrend. Likely to join it in more ways than one is **Rules of Engagement**, which is both a stand-alone game and part of the interlocking Omnitrend game system, IGS, which allows multiple games to interact with one another and share data. This means that players can bring characters from one game into another, play, and then return to the previous game with their new experience retained. The stand-alone game is a command-level space strategy game in which the player directs a fleet of starships on a multitude of missions.

The program includes a mission builder that allows existing missions to be customized or new ones to be created. Scenarios from **Breach 2** may be loaded and run whenever the player attacks selected outposts. **Breach 2** meanwhile is being re-released for the IBM with an improved player interface. This new version will also feature a scenario builder and contain fourteen pre-set scenarios.

Mindcraft is probably best known for the Magic Candle series, for which the latest release is **Vol 2: The Four and Forty**.

Nemesis

Until recently, **Go**, the game Will Wright described in this magazine as being 'the ultimate in boardgame design', has received little attention from software houses. Bang the gong then for **Nemesis Version 5.0**. This will be the market leader in a market invisible to the naked eye. This is *the* program for beginners and experts alike. The main attraction of the program is the learning support it offers.

Another Nemesis program, **Scribbler**, can be loaded in to allow easy creation of annotated games. Essentially **Scribbler** is an on-line learning aid and tutorial all rolled into one. The program has the capacity to allow the player to associate 64 diagrams and separate text comments with each turn, and with any or all of those note up to 26 continuation or variation move sequences. The organizational flow can be directed according to the player's desire.

Version 5.0 supports modem play, including networking through CompuServe. Games can be saved into 'books', allowing the player to organize related games into one book, or a subsection of a book. In addition to the standard 'stone' representation, pieces may be depicted as penguins or turtles, among others. **Nemesis 5.0** will be released for the IBM and Amiga in January, but zen again...

New World

Update: **Might and Magic III: Isle of Terra** and **Planet's Edge** should both be available as you read this.

Origin

Along with Access, Origin is leading the field in the race to produce the first game that will require a Cray Supercomputer to run it. The company's latest entrant in this high-tech relay race is **Strike Commander** (Preview, pages40-1). Like **Wing Commander** before it, this game was produced by Manchester-born Chris Roberts, now a resident of the funky cowboy town of Austin, Texas. 'I like it there because it doesn't rain,' he told me drily.

Chris has also been hard at work on **Wing Commander II: Vengeance of the Kilrathi**. This will feature a new assortment of star-fighter ships, more missions, and all new characters in a continuation of the storyline of the original. It will also include the first use of speech synthesis (in an Origin product) employing the speech chip in the CMS Sound Blaster. Additional disks containing more extensive speech will be available on an expansion disk entitled **Speech Accessory Pack**. This will be the first of several Special Operations Modules that will support the game.

Another huge game booming out from the speakers on the Origin stand

was **Ultima VII: The Black Gate**. This is the first chapter of book three in the **Ultima** saga. All these games like to stress their relationship with the cinematic arts. This is fine, but there is also a darker, less appealing side to this connection: somewhat ominously, Origin has 'rated' **Ultima VII** 'MP-13' which apparently means it is for 'mature players' (how long is a piece of string?). I say ominously because 'voluntary' censorship (as Origin describe this) has a habit of becoming *in*voluntary once the attention of the thought police has been attracted. It's bad enough having them in your living room every time you rent a video, so give us a break, guys, let the public decide what it wants to play without any of this certificate nonsense.

Like most of Origin's current games, **Ultima VII** will require a 386 AT to run it. The high-tech barrier is not the only one to be breached by the Origin onslaught: all the aforementioned games will have an RRP of $80.

Paragon

The lockers of boardgames company GDW have proved ripe for plunder. Leading the software hordes in this quest is Paragon, aided and abetted by GDW's own Marc Miller. Not exactly following on where **Megatraveller 1** left off is **Megatraveller 2: Quest for the Ancient**. Like all good companies should, Paragon has not only listened to its customers (and the critics), but has acted. In this context this means taking on board the flak levelled at the first game and putting the wrongs right. **MT2** will therefore have an improved interface and a revised combat system.

The storyline revolves around a global crisis on the desert planet Rhlyanor. A mysterious structure, believed to have been built 300 000 years ago, has been spewing life threatening toxins. The only hope of combating this crisis lies in finding the Ancient leader, Grandfather. In the quest to find granddad, players will be able to thread their way through a 100 different worlds, with at least half a million square miles a planet. More than 10 different starships will be available for travel. Human and Vargr (genetically engineered bow-wows) characters can be generated and will react according to their skills.

From the murky ancient world, Paragon moves to the sleaze of **Twilight 2000**. This was also created with considerable input from Marc Miller. The game thrusts the player into a dark future; specifically the aftermath of the Third World War and the locale of Poland where battles still rage (vladi hell!). This is a squad-level role-playing game with the player controlling a central character while at the same time issuing commands to his squad of 20. As in **MT2**, success in missions will depend on character abilities. Both these games will be released in the UK by the very wonderful Entertainment International.

Raw

Wandsworth and Texas have not, hitherto, had very much in common. Storm Computers and its Internecine label are based in the barren wastes of south west London (*not that barren! – resident Production Editor*). The company has now opened an office in the barren wastes of south west Texas. Going under the name of Raw, it is about to unleash a barrage of games that should appeal to the readers of *Strategy Plus*. One of their first releases will be **Space Inc**, a very attractive combination of role-playing and strategy set in the barren wastes of south west space.

Also due soon is **Struggle for Guadacanal** – a naval wargame with superb graphics. Next year will see the release of a Second World War naval game with a **Harpoon** style interface.

Sierra

Although there was not a lot new to see on the stand, this was more than compensated for by the presence of the ebullient Al Lowe and amicable Christy Marx. The latter's presence was because of the forthcoming **Conquests of the Longbow: Legend of Robin Hood**. The game's release is being timed to fit in with that of the Kevin Costner movie *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Christy, who wrote the storyline for the game, will be revealing all in our next issue.

Al's large presence can be accounted for by the fact that **Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does a Little Undercover Work** is close to a finish. The only other new Sierra product likely to interest our readers is **Police Quest 3: The Kindred**. Homicide detective Sonny Bonds, follows a trail of insanity, brutality, and bizarre ritual killings (sounds like deadline day at our office). The soundtrack was composed by jazz rocker Jan Hammer, who was also responsible for the *Miami Vice* theme.

The diminishing breed of ST owners may care to note that **Kings Quest V** and **Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers** will shortly be available for their excellent, but neglected machine.

Timed to perfection: Conquests of the Longbow: Legend of Robin Hood

Sierra is clearly looking to move out of what they see as the niche adventure market and into big world outside. The company's US marketing in this respect is faultless, and makes the efforts of UK companies to move in this direction look feeble indeed. How the mass market will respond has yet to be determined, but to the hardened gamer Sierra's new products have received heavy static for being 'too simple' and 'over cute'.

Spectrum Holobyte

Although best known for its flight sims, SH is expanding into other areas. The best example of this was **Crisis in the Kremlin**, a political strategy game that pits the player against the upheavals and uncertainty that are so much a part of Soviet politics. This was programmed by Vladi Baculyn, who joined SH direct from the Soviet Union. **CITK** is very much a 'what if' game although the economic model is reputedly accurate.

Players are given the opportunity to initiate realistic policies, budgets, and reforms, but in an experimental setting. It is possible to take on the role of a hard-line Stalinist and impose laws restricting the freedom of the press. Alternatively, Comrade President could experiment with an-

Vladi hell! it's Twilight 2000

archy (and resign?) and discover how society would react to ultimate freedom. The object is to stay in power for 30 years. To accomplish this, losses must be turned into profits, and republics must be deferred from defecting.

The news media comes in two forms: television and newspaper. SH says print stories will not be 'canned', but generated specifically for the event that is occurring. TV broadcasts will come in the form of a smiling anchorman and colour animation segments for each story. **Crisis in the Kremlin** will be available in September for the IBM PC.

The real biggie from SH is, of course, **Falcon 3.0**. The latest ETA is September.

SSI

Although approached with some optimism, SSI's stand was one of the disappointments of the show. There was no sign of Gary Grigsby's Pacific Wargame, while **Conflict Middle East** was another no-show. The big surprise was that SSI has taken on a baseball game, and although there was no mention of the connection in any of the promo blurb, **Tony La Russa's Ultimate Baseball Game** bears an uncanny resemblance to **TV Sports Baseball**. And guess what? It was developed by the same company (Beyond Software) that Cinemaware successfully sued to get its game back before it went bust. Whatever its origins, the game looks good, and would have looked even better were it not at the same show as the towering **Earl Weaver 2**.

Somewhat foolishly, the press kit for **TLRUBG** lists the features of the game and then seeks to compare them with other baseball games on the market. One of these games is **Earl Weaver 1.5**. Wakey, wakey, guys. The aforementioned sequel to this will be out way before your game.

On the fantasy front SSI was showing off the latest in the TSR licensed Forgotten Realms series, **Gateway to the Savage Frontier**.

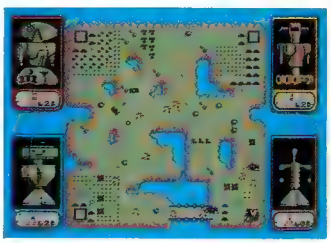
Three-Sixty

Following the amazing success of **Harpoon**, Three-Sixty's reputation took something of a nosedive with **Sands of Time** and **Das Boot,** truly the dogs of war. On the evidence of the goods on display in Chicago the company looks to be back on form.

The basis for assessment is the stunning **Patriot**, which is basically a land-based **Harpoon**. In fact it will use that game's modular BattleSet system. The game design is by the ubiquitous Marc Miller and will feature a two-player modem option. **Patriot** will be a corps and divisional level game with digitized pictures of all military equipment used in the game. The Master Program will contain **BattleSet One: The Gulf War**.

Next year will see the release of **Victory at Sea** (working title). This will be the Second World War version of **Harpoon** and it is currently being programmed by former SPI star, Jim Dunnigan. The first BattleSet available for this will be the Battle of Medway.

A somewhat more unusual offering on the stand was **Theatre of War**. This is an exceptionally attractive looking strategy game which takes place on a 3D battlefield with armies from the feudal period to present day



Through a gate darkly: Ultima VII (top). Shelling out: Linel's snail Traders (bottom)

available for call-up. Weapons, too, show a similar disregard for conventional parameters: crossbows, sling shots, and Patriot missiles will all be at the player's disposal. A modem option will also be available for this game which has 'winner' writ large all over it.

Not all is war and worry, however, at Three-Sixty. There is also the **1992 Winter Olympics**. This hitherto neglected subject at last looks like it's going to get a game worthy of the name 'simulation'. The game is based on the 1992 Winter Games, to be held in Albertville, France. Designed in conjunction with ABC Sports, this simulation will use the actual topological maps from the Olympic's top architects.

Back to **Harpoon**, for anyone who does not yet own the game Three-Sixty is offering a special Challenger Pack Limited Edition. This will contain the most recent version of the master program, the North Atlantic Convoy BattleSet with 16 scenarios, the Scenario Editor and the brand new 325-page *Harpoon Battle Book*. The US price of this outstanding package is $89.95.

Villa Crespo

Card sharps may care to note that *Strategy Plus* will be publishing a guide to software programs on the subject in the near future. Among the products covered will be those of Villa Crespo. Its best-known game is probably **Amarillo Slim: Dealer's Choice** along with his **Five Card Stud.** The former allows the user to learn winning strategies for 28 varieties of poker as well as to discover correct betting and discarding strategies. An on-line tutor is provided. VC's latest release is **Edward O Thorp's Real Blackjack**. This is a tutorial game pitched at the beginner or intermediate level player. Both these games will be covered in full in the forthcoming article.

Virgin

Most of the Virgin traffic goes the other way, but the American end still produces a few surprises. One of these is **Conan The Cimmerian**. This is what might be described as an action-based role-playing game.

Update: Vengeance of Excalibur will be released in July. **Shuttle** is now scheduled for a October release on all formats.

Trading spaces

If there's nothing at the Chicago CES that interests you, then take up knitting. The show was better than anyone had a right to expect considering so little has emerged since Las Vegas. There was nothing that stood out as being really wild, but so what? The word that springs to mind when describing the show is 'solid'. But that sounds kind of stodgy and fails to covey the plethora of originality on display.

If I were handing out prizes I'd give one to Maxis for **Sim Ant,** probably *the* most original game at the show. Eddie Dombrower would be up there on the rostrum also for **Earl Weaver II**.

And let's not forget little Linel from Switzerland; if its **Traders** game pans out this could be one of the surprise hits of the year.

No, the problem for most players this year is not going to be finding games to play, but finding the time to play them. SP

Many thanks to the following for their help, without which this article would not have been possible: Ali Atabek, Basconi's Stuffed Pizza Parlour, Leslie Bianchi, Jeff Braun, Vince Denaro, Eddie Dombrower, Susan Dunn, Rachel Famighette, Markus Grimmer, Rita Harrington, John Ingram, Simon Jeffery, Pat Price Monroe, Steve Peterson, Chris Roberts, Marylynn Slattery, Jessica Switzer, Steve Witzel and Skip Wood.

Thanks also to NEC for hosting the sassiest party of the show at Chicago's Park West, without which, er...

Robin Smith's International Cricket

Robin Smith, the saviour of England on more than one occasion, now has a cricket game to his name courtesy of Challenge Software. The company claims that **Robin Smith's International Cricket** 'represents a new approach to sports strategy games' – that is to say there are no arcade sequences, although there are also no stats either.

Players are rated on a one to three scale. There must always be six bowlers, two openers, and a wicketkeeper, although names can be changed to accord with the positions. There's no sign of Smith's nemesis, the wild and woolly Merv Hughes, or indeed anything to suggest this game will be any different from all the other UK sports sims. Available after the tea break on the Amiga and ST.

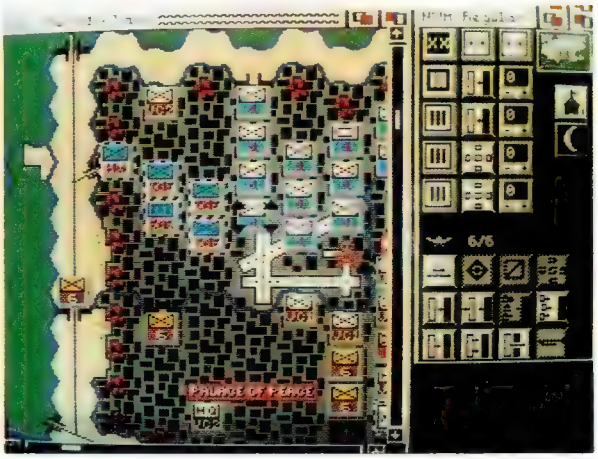
Cricket, lovely cricket... perhaps: Robin Smith's International Cricket

Halls of Montezuma

The latest release in SSG's Battlefront series is **Halls of Montezuma,** specially programmed for Amigas with 1Mb of memory. The subtitle, A Battle History of the United States Marine Corps, should provide an idea of the subject matter. Included with the game is a full-colour paper map and eight pre-set scenarios:

- Mexico City;
- Belleau Wood;
- Iwo Jima;
- Okinawa – the Shuri Line;
- Okinawa – the Final Redoubt;
- Pusan;
- Inchon; and
- Hue.

Halls of Montezuma is also available for the PC, Mac and Apple IIGS.



Hue, what a scorcher! SSG's Halls of Montezuma

Charge of the Light Brigade

The next release from Impressions will be **Charge of the Light Brigade**. In addition to the famous battle itself, the game will include three scenarios: The Thin Red Line, Battle for Redoubts, and The Charge of the Heavy Brigade. The game system will be an enhanced version of the one used in **Cohort** and **Rorke's Drift**.

New features include:

- a two-player option;
- optional 'fog of war' limited information; and
- an optional time lag for execution of orders.

Available at the end of June on the ST and Amiga, the PC version should follow in mid September.

Gunning for glory: Charge of the Light Brigade from Impressions

Chris Roberts is the unlikely lad from Manchester who is now director of new technology at Origin Systems in Austin, Texas. Already to his credit is **Wing Commander**, and the soon to be released **Wing Commander 2**. Both games pushed the boundaries of game design (and machine requirements) into the stratosphere. Passing them in the fast lane, though, is **Strike Commander**, which Chris acknowledges will run '10–15% slower than **Wing Commander**'.

He is keen to stress the cinematic nature of **Strike Commander**. 'What we are trying to do is provide a cinematic experience within the framework of a game,' he says. 'We want to involve players emotionally with believable characters against the backdrop of a script that unfolds according to how they perform in battle sequences.'

To execute a cinematic sequence, Chris and his programmers collaborate on a vision for the scene, and then use a 3-Rendering package to construct an entire set within the studio. Planes, tanks, and other mobile objects are built to move around the set in a programmed pattern, and the director indicates what camera movements he wishes to install. The program is left to execute its instructions, and eight hours later the designers have a sequence composed of hundreds of thousands of frames which would have taken animators hundreds of hours to produce.

So all the high-tech gear actually *cuts* costs? 'Yes,' says Chris.'Using these computer-based techniques, we can create complete scenes and special effects that most film production companies can't afford to do. **Strike Commander** has richly textured green hills and water with different shades of blue depending on the depth. From the right perspective, you'll see crescent waves. Fly over this terrain in true 3D, no matter at what angle you're watching, and you'll be saying "My god, I'm here!".'

But how much disk space is this going to take up? 'It's going to use up a lot of disk real estate, that's for sure – anywhere up to 15Mb. But I truly believe that you've never before seen anything in terms of this, an interactive movie, on a personal computer'.

To generate terrain, **Strike Commander** resorts to the standard polygonal approach of traditional flight simulators. The difference here lies in the refinement of that system.

Instead of producing flat beds of terrain with a couple of pyramids here and there to break the monotony, the RealSpace 3D system used in **Wing Commander** generates shaded, rolling terrain with mountains, valleys and lakes. This level of detail is possible because the terrain is tessellated and fractally generated. The fractals, reproducing the chaos inherent in natural formations, make the terrain look exceptionally realistic, while the triangles forming the tessellated terrain are gourard-shaded. The difference between this and the method used by conventional flight sims is that triangles used in the latter are flat shaded.

Taxing time: the player must balance logistics and morals

The Plot

Strike Commander kicks off in the year 2000 with the second collapse of the American economy. 'Eco terrorists' have committed the sacrilegious act of seizing Yosemite National Park. Meanwhile in the Big Apple, mercenaries have been hired by the IRS to collect taxes. Street battles between recalcitrant New Yorkers and the IRS goons are an everyday occurrence. Flying into this anarchic scenario is Stern's Wildcats. The player takes on the role of second-in-command to James Stern himself. The tasks ahead are fraught with danger. The Wildcats fly a fine line between right and wrong, and profit and loss. The viability of missions must be judged both from a logistical and moral standpoint. Other characters in the game will offer advice but the final choice, and the thus the fate of the Wildcats, lies in the hands of the player.

Strike Commander uses bit-mapping to generate realistic objects. Items such as panelling, insignia, fighter planes and burn marks are displayed with texture-mapping. This enables the designer to draw a bit-mapped image in great detail by rendering the image in a paint program, and then slapping it across the face of the object.

The program knows that the object's face is bit-mapped, and can transform the image based on the angle from which it is viewed. This is the same process used by supercomputers to get highly photo-realistic models. The result is the production polygonal objects as rich and as detailed as hand-rendered images, different only in that you can move them around in 'three dimensions'.

Chris enthuses: 'I believe we've created a three-dimensional world that is far more realistic than anything seen on a PC before. It looks the same as a military flight simulator. Apart from the fact that we are working at lower resolution, it approaches that level of realism. All this comes together to build a sense of an alternate reality.'

And what of the future beyond this?

'As we move into the medium of CD-ROM development over this next year, we'll be making more interactive movies. And it'll be one better than movies because you'll be inside of it. Give us five to 10 years and watch out, Hollywood!' SP

Wingmates may be as much a hindrance as a help

The Crew

Commander James Stern
The loss of his carrier, the US Shiloh, in the petro wars of 2001 prompted Stern to resign from the navy and establish his own squad of mercs, based as much on sound moral principles as sound profit principles.

Lyle Richards
The only other survivor of the Shiloh, Lyle Richards fought valiantly against hopeless odds until he was forced to eject. This experience scarred him, and he struggles daily with the knowledge that his deepest fears may endanger his team members on a future mission.

Billy Parker
Billy is a talented, fearless pilot. Ironically, the very aggressiveness that bolsters his kill ratio also makes him a dangerous wing-mate.

Miguel Schrader
Having been a Nicaraguan POW, Miguel is knowledgeable of adventurism's political consequences. He understands the hidden pitfalls of mercenary work better than anyone else on the team.

Gwen Forester
Gwen is a total anarchist *(offer her a job – Ed)* and has a great aversion to authority in any form. Miguel and Billy are rivals for her affection, placing stress on a squadron already besieged by the economic and strategic demands of mercenary life.

Clayton 'Tex' Travis
Travis is the player's personal 'devil' throughout the Wildcat's campaigns. Will his ambition shatter the Wildcats, or can the team be held together?

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L'EMPEREUR

Koei has turned west for its latest visions of conquest. 'Deep Throat' sneaks a look at L'empereur

Yokohama, Hiyoshi Honcho Street, 8.45pm: it's time to act. I have a mission to accomplish. One of my informers tells me that Koei has produced a new economic, diplomatic and military simulation called **L'empereur**. The game, which will be soon released, exists only for the FM-Towns machine at the moment. I have to be the first to know what it is like – it is my task and my job...

The two last employees leave the building.

'See you tomorrow, Sabyo san,' says one voice in Japanese. I don't even hear the answer. Good.

The stairs do not creak too loudly – everything is quiet. I use my special master key and begin my quest. No trouble yet. After some time, I discover a big place which seems to be the meeting room of the development team. I notice an FM-Towns on a table. Good, I hope no one minds if I nose around a bit. I have my mission to accomplish.

In a locked cupboard, I discover the prototype of the packaging, the manual and the disks. Damn it! the whole thing is in Japanese! I will really need my English-Japanese dictionary. Under the pale moonlight, I put both disks into the FM-Towns – the 3.5in one and the CD. Then, it's time to boot the machine...

The first image is a beautiful digitized painting of Napoleon, shown as a daguerreotype, made by David, riding his famous white horse during the Italian campaign. After a while, I beheld the Imperial trademark, an N bordered by bay leaves. At the same time the drums of war begin to play. It sounds typical of the music played by Napoleon's guards. Already I felt like one of Napoleon's soldiers, standing to attention and ready to fight! The box claims that there are 14 different original pieces of music and, of course, they are of CD quality. I can feel the thrill of glory running up my spine. Will I be hit by the Napoleon syndrome?

Anyway, the presentation continues. It reminds the player, in animated form, of the main events of the French Revolution. Unbelievably, the Koei presentations become even better. That's it! I have achieved ambience and can start the game.

The final goal of **L'empereur** is to become emperor. For this purpose, the player views a map of Europe, more or less extended, depending on the scenario that has been selected. Unlike **Genghis Khan**, **Bandit Kings** or even **Nobunaga II**, the player does not control countries or states, but towns or capital cities. Napoleon or his armies move from town to town by following the roads that link them. In addition, the player can also move ships and therefore make some seaborne expeditions. All the moves are made easily using the mouse.

Nap happy: a PC version of Koei's L'empereur should follow the FM-Towns one, from which these screen shots are taken

The game has four scenarios with four sub-goals to attain. The first one sees Bonaparte at Toulon, when he was just a captain. The second puts Bonaparte at Saint-Malo in 1798. The player should know that if he tries to withdraw troops from the town, he will be attacked soon by Britain's glorious and efficient navy! Young Bonaparte, you are warned once and for all! The third scenario sees Bonaparte as first consul of France and the fourth has Napoleon as emperor.

The number of towns or capitals to control varies according to the scenario. There are nine towns for Toulon scenario and all the European towns for **L'empereur** scenario!

The commands should imbue the player with a feeling of déjà vu. Indeed, it can be said that **L'empereur** uses a mix of **Genghis Khan**, **Bandit Kings** and **Nobunaga** commands with new elements. It could be seen as a kind of 'best of' made by Koei. For instance, the player can still raise an exceptional tax to increase his income. He can still also change the tax rate or receive information by espionage. He can distribute food or specialities to the country's people. He can also invest in trading, industry, agriculture and even (new!) in medicine because the level of hygiene influences the good health of the people.

The classic commands mainly represent the economic side of the game. The goal is, as always, to develop towns to make them stronger and to get more powerful armies. There is also the notion of fidelity for the player's officers. As Napoleon he can decide who will be in charge of each unit. Obviously, the officers have to stay faithful. For this purpose, Napoleon can give them rewards or even a simple but beautiful speech! It seems that for these men of honour, it was sufficient. Strange days!

New commands cover decisions on policy as well as military options. Policy seems to be the main innovation of the game. By policy, you have to understand the relation between the towns and the French government. For instance, each year, in January, the government decides which town controlled by the French armies will pay the taxes. It could be the town where Napoleon resides. In this case, a precious amount of money will be taken away. In March, it's indirect taxes on trading. And the more you pay, the more you will have to pay the next year. In exchange, Napoleon can make requests of the government. He can receive ships, soldiers or, even better, guns. Thus, one of the sub-goals of the game is to pay the least possible and to receive as much as possible.

To conclude policy options, the government can also exchange prisoners with other countries and put them in reserve. And above all, the government can act by

itself. It is independent and in the position to declare war or to send its armies where it wants to. Its liberty of action can sometimes thwart Napoleon's schemes.

The military innovations mainly occur in the pure wargame side. First of all, there is artillery. Guns can shoot at ranges of up to five hexes, but they have to face an enemy unit to open fire – artillery can't spray cannonballs everywhere inside its range. The possible target area is clearly shown on the map. This restriction implies that the player has to correctly rotate the guns (this takes one turn) to be sure to face the enemy. It also makes encircling moves by cavalry or flank attacks by infantry more rewarding.

Second, a unit can be demoralized. This status is shown on the map by a pirate's skull and crossbones displayed on a unit's icon. When a unit is demoralized, it can't move or attack. The unit has to wait until its moral recovers.

Third, the player can build or destroy bridges. In **L'empereur** a bridge is now no more a key point because an army can now get round such obstacles.

Abandon the guns

Fourth, an artillery unit can abandon its guns and become an infantry unit. It's especially useful when menaced by cavalry units.

Fifth, there is a special mode of attack called 'assault'. It seems to work a little differently from the system in **Nobunaga II**. If an infantry or a cavalry unit decides to use this attack, it will in the same turn attack the same unit several times the same unit until it the enemy or itself is virtually destroyed. This tactic can either create breaches in the enemy's defence or break through an encirclement.

Sixth, each army has some reserves which can be called upon if necessary. They will not come from other towns, however, as they do in **Genghis Khan**. It is just the reserve of the army that is currently fighting.

Better than banditry

The commands make the game even more challenging than **Bandit Kings** or **Genghis Khan**, because they increase the variety of tactics.

As far as the display goes, there is Koei's usual number of information screens, all of which are straightforwardly presented. There is a calculator where the player decides the number of soldiers or food that he wants to send to a town: by clicking on the calculator it's possible to determine the number to send.

At the start of the game, one of 14 different tunes can be selected. The music was not only done in the Napoleonic style – a Russian dance, a wedding passage, a Spanish bolero with castanets(!) and even a mellow Japanese song are available. Music critics might say Japanese musicians are on a par with French ones!

Hey, the sun is beginning to appear and the rain has stopped. And as the PC version is not planned before September, it's time to play **L'empereur** scenario.

'Hallo, Sabyo san, good morning.'

Oh no, they are already here – do they never stop work! It's time to leave the office! But don't worry, Koei people, Deep Throat will soon be back! SP

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True Confessions

The lives and loves of Strategy Plus writers revealed

Jamie Thompson

(IBM PC)

The game that has been taking up all my computer time this month is **Elite Plus**. Having played the original **Elite** on the BBC and the Atari ST, I couldn't resist to the temptation to hammer my way through the starways again when the PC version came out. Mind you, there's not much that is 'plus' about it, save for a lot more missions.

There is still something challenging about the game, though, even after all these years. The PC version is much easier than its ancestors and I have finally achieved the coveted title of **Elite**. This heroic achievement has taken me about six years to attain, and with three different computers!

Elite Plus is truly addictive. Eating has become an interfering chore in the need to get extra credits to pay for the galactic hyperdrive. At night I dream of incoming laser fire, and the satisfying sound of pirates dying in an inferno of flames. I've taken to responding only to the name of 'Commander'. I go into shops and ask their dealing price in Thargoid alien items, before I realize that I'm not in a Coriolis Space Station but in a newsagent's on Brixton Hill.

In desperation I turned to **Medieval Lords**, a good solid strategy game with plenty to think about and plenty to achieve. Although it is a good game, solo play becomes inadequate after a while. Its true worth can be found in the multi-player option.

There are few games that I return to regularly – occasionally some great oldies like **Empire** and **Colonial Conquest**. Mostly I play CRPGs and, to a lesser extent, wargames. Recently I've been playing **Fountain of Dreams** (mutant killer clowns on the rampage in Florida!), but the game I would most like to crack is **Bane of the Cosmic Forge**. I'm stuck on this one so if there's anyone out there who can provide some tips I'd really appreciate it *(Go to Mama on page 61 – Ed)*.

John Scott

(Amiga)

'Do not despise the serpent because he is small, for who is to say that he will not turn into a dragon and bite you?'

I remember years ago tuning in to the BBC once a week for what was my first taste of Sino-Entertainment – *The Water Margin*. This saga covered the incomparable exploits of Lin Chong and the nine dozen heroes who trashed bad guys and fought their way towards truth, justice, and the ancient Chinese way.

Recently I was given **Bandit Kings of Ancient China**, and there they all were – the 36 stars of Heaven and the 72 stars of the Earth – in short, the nine dozen heroes are back! Since then I've been adopting the persona of Lin Chong, baffling my friends by quoting such Taoist gems as 'Governing a large state is like boiling a small fish', while trying to recruit enough heroes to take on the arch baddie, Gao Qiu. So far I've failed miserably.

It's great to see more multi-player games appearing for the Amiga, and this blend of diplomacy, economics and warfare is unquestionably one of the best yet. Choose from any of the four very different scenarios, set a difficulty level, get from zero to seven human players, send out for a chow mein, and enjoy!

John Harrington

(ST)

The soccer season is over so I dug out **Kick Off** to combat withdrawal symptoms. The graphics are nothing to write to the Royal College of Art about, particularly compared with **I Play 3D Football**, but the game does rattle on at a fair pace – too fair for my liking. There's never any time to put your foot on the ball and slow down the play. It's overrated, in my opinion, but still one of the best arcade soccer games around.

Another sports game featuring blobs running around a field is the excellent **Gridiron**. There must surely be a case for a **Gridiron II**, for all this American Football games lacks is a league play option. The contrast with **Kick Off** is marked, with the emphasis on seeing the whole play unfold.

After a hard day at the office there's nothing more I like than chopping people's heads off, and the classic **Barbarian** satisfies my urges in this respect. OK, it's a joystick-waggling fight sim, but when played between two players who know each other's style well, it's as tense as a long rally in **Pro Tennis Tour 2**.

Great sound effects, lurid graphics and a mordant humour could make barbarians of us all Some *Strategy Plus* staff are half-way there already *(Make that all the way – Ed)*.

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They come from out of the blue, sport

SSG is one of those strange games companies which produces only one thing: games.

There are no press releases, and no advance hype – the company's games arrive seemingly out of the blue. Perhaps the fact that the company is based in Australia has something to do with it.

Anyway, the latest offering to drop in from the outback is an enhanced version of **Warlords**, the excellent strategy game set in the fantasy world of Illuria.

New features include: better AI routines, especially when playing at the 'warlords' level, and many improvements to the mouse interface such as now being able to deselect a stack with a right click.

Rule changes include: different movement allowances for flying creatures and heroes, while the chances of a hero dying in an encounter in the ruins have now been reduced. Owners of the original game should send Aus$12.50 and their registration card to SSG's Australian office for an upgrade. Visa and Mastercard/Access are accepted.

Another new release from SSG is **Halls of Montezuma** for Amigas with 1Mb of memory (see Previews, page 39).

The game will be reviewed in full next issue.

Beyond the valley of the inflatable dolls

And now the simulation you've all been waiting for: **Barbie PC Fashion Designer & Colour**, brought to you by the Craft Corporation of Ohio, USA.

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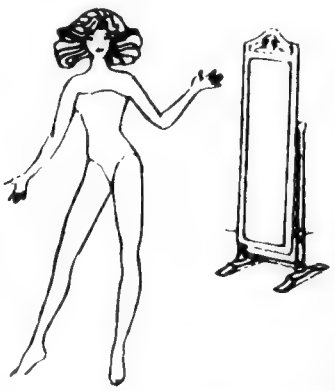
Don't miss this chance to deconstruct one of America's great cultural icons. **Barbie PC** is Windows 3.0 compatible and will run in either EGA or VGA.

STOP PRESS: Look out for our hints and tips feature in a forthcoming issue.



Hey there, Barbie girl: hot stuff as Barbie gets down to her scanties

Adlib is a sound buy

Mindscape has signed an agreement with AdLib, the maker of the popular soundcard, to distribute its products in the UK. The new AdLib Gold card will have a DAC feature which will enable the card to recognize digitized speech.

Mindscape boss Geoff Heath commented: 'I'm delighted that we have got AdLib, it's undoubtedly the best supported card around. With the arrival of AdLib Gold I expect the price of the original AdLib to drop to around £80.'

•US Gold asks us to point out that Amiga version of **Eye of the Beholder** does contain an end sequence. Sandy Eisen's comments in *Strategy Plus* issue 9 were directed at the PC version.

Where are they now?

You've read the 'reviews', you've seen the ads, you may even be wearing the T-shirts. But where the hell are the games? For your delectation we present a round-up of the missing, but not presumed lost, together with their expected appearance dates, all of which, of course, are subject to change.

- **F-14 Tomcat** (PC) – first week in August
- **Deuteros** (ST and Amiga) – last week in August
- **Hunter** (PC) – First week in September
- **Riders of Rohan** (PC) – End of August
- **Falcon 3.0** (PC) – September
- **Flight of the Intruder** (ST and Amiga) – July
- **Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe** (PC) – Beta testing now, expected in September.
- **Cruise for a Corpse** – ST and Amiga version September, PC one month later.

The converted

- **Life and Death – Amiga and ST**
- **Moonbase – Amiga (PC version reviewed issue 4)**
- **Gunboat – Amiga**
- **Search for the King – Amiga**
- **Worlds at War – Amiga (PC version reviewed issue 7)**
- **Blue Max – ST (PC version reviewed issue 5)**
- **Das Boot – ST (PC version reviewed issue 5)**
- **Pro Tennis Tour 2 – ST (Amiga version reviewed issue 8)**
- **B.A.T. – PC (Amiga version reviewed issue 7)**

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We hope you'll take this opportunity not only to try the game for yourself, but also to join with friends: simply have them choose a race which compliments your own. Providing that you both / all choose the same deadline and mention to us that you'd like to be in the same game, we can ensure you are placed together in a special Ready-Alliance game. Write to:

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History is bunk

Mike Woodhouse's review of **Rorke's Drift** states 'a small company of about 100 soldiers was massacred by 40 000 Zulus'. This is inaccurate. The significant thing about the action at Rorke's Drift was that this small British outpost on the Natal frontier in fact held off the Zulus.

What made this even more significant was that immediately before this action, on 22 January 1879, a Zulu force under the command of Cetshwayo (sometimes called Cetewayo) almost totally wiped out a force of 1 600 soldiers at Isandhlwana. This was the worst British defeat since the Crimean War.

The Zulus were subsequently defeated at Ulundi on 4 July the same year. I believe it is the Isandhlwana defeat that Mike Woodhouse is confusing with the action at Rorke's Drift.

DF Marston
Rickmansworth
Hertfordshire

History is bunk 2

I must take *Strategy Plus* to task for part of the article *Wargames – A Briefing* in issue 8.

In the section covering Zulu wargames, Mike Woodhouse reviews **Rorke's Drift** and says 'about 100 British soldiers were massacred by 40 000 Zulus'.

I can't understand how a person reviewing a wargame in the magazine can be so ignorant of military history. Rorke's Drift mission station was defended by 85 able-bodied men (plus wounded), most of whom belonged to B company, Second Battalion, 24th Foot (South Wales Borderers) commanded by Lt Chard of the Royal Engineers.

Between 22–23 January, 4 000 Zulus made six full-scale attacks and were finally forced to withdraw after suffering heavy casualties of about 400 dead.

The British lost 17 dead and had 10 seriously wounded. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded to the defenders, the highest total for any single action.

This is one of the great feats of military history, and even Mike Woodhouse must have seen this classic defence restaged in the film *Zulu*.

All of this throws his review into a bit of turmoil. The idea of the game is to try to recreate history, not just to see how long before all the British are dead.

I haven't played the game, but if as Mike Woodhouse says, the manual states 'there is no way out alive', it sounds like a pretty badly researched effort!

David Eltringham
Stockton
Cleveland

Mike Woodhouse writes: *Who gives a stuff that the Zulus were subsequently defeated? The game* ***Rorke's Drift*** *was about 100 soldiers getting shredded into little pieces by 40 000 African warriors.*

Game lover

I humbley [sic] want you to send me a game because I love to play games, so that is why I want you to send me a game. A game is a great thing to me. I need it badly, so please send it to me. I will be looking forward to the reply. Goodbye and god will bless you. Amen.

From your lover,
Rashed Abiala Mukaila
Marnia, Lagos

I'm off to Lagos! – Ed.

Net interest

I found your article on Sierra's multiplayer network games (News, *Strategy Plus* 9) very interesting – a great idea. I wonder if you could tell me whether Sierra or any other software house intends to produce any network games that people could buy. It would be great to have, say, four computers linked together, each with their own screen, playing the same game at the same time.

I would also like to thank you for having the advert on the play-by-mail game The Keys of Medokh. I joined the game when you first advertised it and have found it extremely exciting. The depth of the game is immense; I love the interaction with other players in the game. This is why a network multi-player game on the computer would be so brilliant.

Robin Starkey
Manchester

Sierra plans to produce games specifically to run on its planned network.

Truth will out

How nice it was to pick up issue 5 of *Strategy Plus*, a magazine fresh to these shores. Please keep up the excellent quality of your unbiased reviews, to date the magazine has no equal.

Ah, but now for the iron fist in the velvet glove...

I cannot emphasise how important it is when reviewing a game to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So often have I bought a game based on a reviewer's opinion only to find that this or that applies to only the IBM version, or worse still, the reviewer resorts to editorializing, or plagiarizing the back of the box (*Zero, ACE, Amiga Action*, and so on).

Dave Morris, in his article in issue 5, waxes lyrical about the ST version of **UMS II**. But does he review it? On my Amiga 500 it runs as slow as a wet weekend owing to the constant redrawing of the screen between moves and scrolling. Such time-wasting is an insult to the 68000 CPU. The programmer should be sacked.

George Campbell writes of **Typhoon of Steel**: 'It is a sequel to **Panzer Strike**, but obviously you don't need to own its predecessor to enjoy the game'.

No, George, but maybe it would be nice to first learn how to play it, then maybe I would (unlikely) start to enjoy it. Did I not read in the badly written manual that all references to the tutorial should be ignored as there isn't one?

In **Action Stations** (Amiga) there is a bug. A *big* bug. Editing group ten of the ships is impossible – you cannot even delete them!

I bought **Harpoon** the other day and the manual talks about differences between my version (1.0) and the 1.1 version. What exactly is the difference?

P Evans-Leigh
Perth, W Australia

Yes, there is a bug in the Amiga version of ***Action Stations****, but this has now been corrected. Send your registration card to Direct Soft in Melbourne, or Internecine in the UK (see advert in this issue) the upgrade. The 1.0 version of Harpoon is the beta test version and will not run any of the Battlesets. Send your registration card to Three-Sixty Software in Texas to obtain the correct version.*

Kick out

I have am an Atari ST owner and I enjoy the type and calibre of games which you cover. I read with you interest your feature on computer wargames. I liked the look of **Fire Brigade**, but when I looked to find its price I saw that it required 1Mb RAM. Since my 520STFM has only 0.5Mb RAM I am unable to buy it. In your

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reviews, could you please mention whether 1MB RAM is needed.

In response to your reply to David Glynn's letter, I too think that **Kick Off 2** is a superb game. If Mr Walker cannot come to grips with the control system, **Kick Off 2** offers an option to slow the game down to half or even quarter speed.

Also the presentation of the game is infinitely better than that of its predecessor. Just because he didn't enjoy the original, it's no excuse for not trying the sequel.

Now question time:

1. Is **Conflict In Europe** a budget game? If so is it any relation to **Conflict**, produced by Virgin Mastertronic?

2. Are your forthcoming cover disks going to be compatible with my Atari STFM?

3. Are you going to include features such as the history of a major publisher (such as SSI) with all its releases summarized?

4. Are you going to introduce a rating indication so that readers can compare the games reviewed in at least a minor way?

Tudor Boddam-Whetham
Nailsworth
Gloucestershire

*We try to list configuration requirements but with so many games to cover it's inevitable that there will be the occasional omission. The only demo disk available for **Floor 13** is on the IBM. This was Virgin Mastertronic's decision, not ours.*

Answer time:

1. Yes and no.

2. Our disk offers will be format specific.

3. Good idea – we'll give it a shot.

4. This will depend on what our reader survey reveals.

Kick out 2

I am sory that Brian Walker finds **Kick Off** unplayable, because he is missing out on a truly remarkable piece of software. Perhaps a spell with **Kick Off 2**'s half and quarter speed options would allow him to improve his joystick skills.

I, however, do not feel that one man's difficulty with the game warrants its exclusion from the sports games article in issue 7. **Kick Off** is without doubt an extremely popular and successful product. This success has been not been built on a pointless licensing deal or on a fancy advertising campaign, nor has it been built on the reputation of the publisher Anco. It has been built on the game's superb playability. To state that there are no decent computer football games is both untrue and unfair; whatever your personal opinions, you cannot dismiss the game completely.

Although I would concede that the graphics are not exactly mouthwatering, they are moe than adequate for the job. Surely Brian of all people appreciates game play above all else? I think the game is better looking than its competitors: it is colourful and it is easy to see what is going on. If this is what we have to put up with to allow the game to run as quickly as it does, then I am all for it.

So come on Brian, get that joystick out and give **Kick Off** another go. But try not to think of Blackpool while you are playing – I'm sure you'll find this will help.

David Glynn
Newcastle upon Tyne

*After David's original letter (*Strategy Plus *8) I tried **Kick Off 2**. The joystick control was not a problem. I still felt it bore no relation to the real game. You can see only a part of the pitch at any one time, which makes any sort of 'long ball' game (à la Wimbledon) a non-starter.*

Puns or butter

Whatever happened to the game **Guns Or Butter**, the proposed sequel to **Balance Of Power**? Although the game was 'under development' half a year ago, it never seemed to materialize. Has the project been scrapped or just delayed by unforeseen circumstances?

Stuart Hardy
Wales, Sheffield

***Guns Or Butter** was reviewed in issue 1. As this is sold out, I should tell you the verdict was: 'not enough variety in the choice of strategies to make it wholly satisfying'.*

Glossy coat

In issue 7, **Merchant Colony**, **'Nam**, and **Shattered States** were listed in their respective 'we like' columns. But in issue 8 they received, at best, lukewarm reviews. Were you duped by the glossy packaging?

In contrast, *Wargames – A Briefing* was outstanding, particularly the reviews by Mike Siggins. Will he be contributing regularly?

RT Michaeljohn
London SE15

Mike's time is currently occupied by producing a karaoke fanzine.

We don't like

I am writing for two reasons. The first is to say keep up the good work – the magazine suits my needs and tastes exactly.

The second is to give you a bollocking for ripping me off. Brian Walker gave **'Nam** a 'we like' rating in *Strategy Plus* 7. So the game was duly bought and found to be absolutely awful.

So what is the big deal? Clearly Brian and myself have different tastes, even though this had never manifested itself before. The big deal is that in issue 8 (page 24) he finds the game to be absolutely awful. Brian Walker now owes me one of the following: £30, a grovelling apology and £30, or an explanation, a grovelling £30 and an apology.

Hern the Hunter's articles on **Second Front** were very good, but they refer only to solitaire play. I am fortunate enough to have many local quality opponents and so the solitaire articles and AI debate do not really apply to me. It may be useful for you to survey your readership to determine the proportion of solitaire v face to face (or modem) gamers. This would enable the magazine and possible software houses to target their output more efficiently.

It is good to see that the number of anti-computer-game letters from some of the boardgamers is dwindling. I am old enough to remember a similar reaction to the boardgamers from the miniatures gamers many years ago. It is clear that all hobbies and organisations have a hard core of conservative thought that is opposed to any change or evolution. Just ignore them is what I say, in any event I know these people and they are crap at playing boardgames.

Have you seen **Professional Football Simulation** by Microsearch? It is very similar to **Statis Pro Football** by Avalon Hill, although the computer version has a little more depth. Addictive or what? the game is excellent, quick and just as nerve-wracking as the boardgame.

Pat McCarthy
Litherland
Merseyside

The 'we like' section was based on first impressions of a game. In order to avoid confusion of the type you experienced, this feature has now been dropped and replaced by True Confessions.

*Sorry about **'Nam**, but in future wait for the full review before parting with your moolah.*

MARTIAN DREAMS

Ultimately satisfying

By Randy Snow

Over the years, I have noticed a distinct trend in computer role-playing games. They keep getting better. No one series epitomises this more than **Ultima** from Origin.

I have two questions when I finish playing an **Ultima** game: when will the next one be out and what will I do until then.

Finally, Lord British and Origin Systems came to the rescue by introducing **Savage Empire**, but all too quickly I was finished and had re-entered the mundane reality of everyday life once again. Then, another pleasant surprise came from Origin. **Martian Dreams** arrived and I have been thoroughly involved ever since.

Damn and blast

Lord British gives us a beautiful plot to contend with. The Avatar must go back in time to rescue some of the most brilliant minds of the Victorian era. In 1893, Percival Lowell prepares to lead a group of adventurers to Mars. Owing to unforeseen circumstances, the cannon that is supposed to blast Lowell's party into space fires a day early, sending the most influential people of the time hurtling through space. The Avatar must team up with inventor Nikola Tesla, the renowned Sigmund Freud, Dr CL Blood and journalist Nellie Bly to follow the 1893 mission.

Throughout the game, I found that most of the crew is totally useless. Dr Blood is the most helpful of the lot. Nellie Bly joins up with the Avatar's party, and complains of the Martian cold. Sigmund Freud only plays a role in character generation. At the onset of the trip he will ask certain questions that determine the Avatar's stats and sex. I have not found anything useful about Nikola Tesla.

World service

The world that Lord British has created is enormous. The Avatar has much to do before he can rescue the 1893 expedition. Mars is a harsh world and transportation is a major problem. Traipsing around the countryside can get a bit tedious. When the transportation tubes and canal systems are working, it makes travelling so much more enjoyable. The canal systems are fun to use at first, but travel is sluggish. Once everything is working nicely, the game really gets interesting.

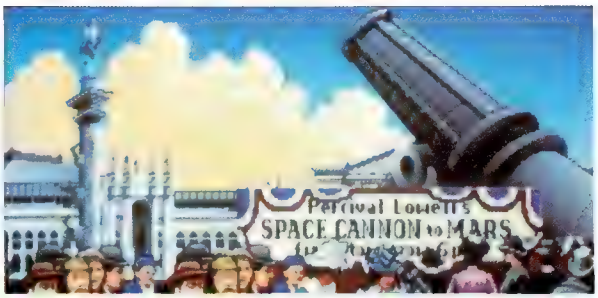
The Dream Machine is one of the more innovative items found in the game. It lets the Avatar access an alternate reality where some of the passengers from the previous expedition have been trapped. The game engine is designed to take full advantage of a mouse. Those familiar with **Ultima VI** and **Savage Empire** will recognize this interface. Using a combination of keyboard commands and the mouse renders the best results.

Screen breaks

The screen is broken up into five sections. In the upper right, a portrait of the character, his or her status, inventory, and current condition are displayed. Just below that is a box describing what is seen and actions the characters perform. From the centre all the way to the far left of the screen is a top-down view of the party and the surrounding area. Above the top-down display there is a section that indicates where the sun currently is. Below the display there are a series of control switches which can be manipulated with the mouse or the equivalent keyboard command. The switches depict the eight commands that can be chosen.

The graphics are a delight to view. **Martian Dreams** really takes advantage of a VGA card. The sounds effects are tremendous when using the Roland MT-32 or equivalent. The AdLib and Sound Blaster are nice also, but there just seems to be something missing. The Roland has a much deeper and fuller tone compared with the AdLib and Sound Blaster tunes.

I did encounter a few problems with **Martian Dreams**. There's nothing that makes the game unplayable mind you, but on one occasion the game locked up. I also had it lock up once again when entering a mine shaft. Going back and performing everything again from the last save is the only solution, as usual. Origin indicates that this could be a memory problem because DOS 4.01 is such a memory hog.



It seems that Lord British is straying away from the true CRPG form. Character development and generation has little to do with what takes place in the game. **Martian Dreams** looks more like an adventure game than a CRPG.

Pump it up

What I enjoy most is the realism and logic within this imaginary setting: before the transportation tubes can become operational, the power must be turned on. The canal system does not work until the pumps have been turned on and water is available in the reservoir. Of course, too much reality in a game can make it unenjoyable.

Fortunately this is not the case here. **Martian Dreams** gets the balance right and is trendy in all the right ways. SP

Designed by
Jeff George

Published by
Origin

IBM PC

256-colour
VGA/MCGA, EGA

Roland, AdLib and
Sound Blaster

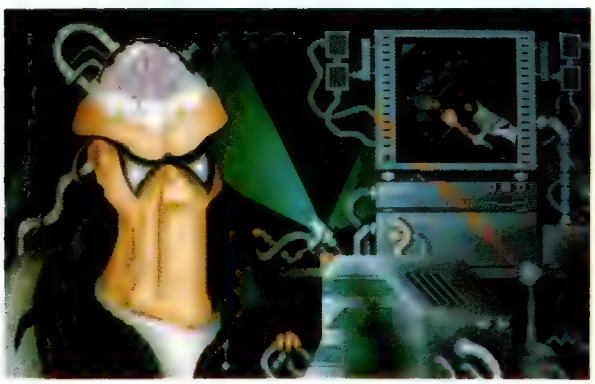
Demoniak

Hard core adventuring

By Theo Clarke

Outside our universe is a really nasty kind of guy called Demoniak. It just so happens that this brilliant scientist chappie has opened up a gateway between Demoniak's dimension and ours. The clever scientist, however, reads the right comics. He knows that when the ultimate evil threatens to invade our universe, the only socially responsible action is to gather a band of mutants and magicians who can drop everything at a moment's notice and save us all.

The premise for **Demoniak** would convince anybody that the adventure is going to be pure schlock were it not that the writer is one Alan Grant, long-time writer of Judge Dredd in *2000AD* and creator of a whole slew of widely acclaimed comic strips with a flare for irony. **Demoniak** shows this wry humour in the character descriptions that form part of the excellent game manual and also in the remorseless use of punning names throughout the game. The use of



stereotypical characters and circumstances is presented as a shared private joke between the player and the author.

Nuts and bolts

With Alan's long experience of writing for a visual medium it is to be expected that **Demoniak** would integrate text and graphics to good effect. This expectation is not realized. The graphics are competent but they are static displays that interrupt the text. The game is yet another text adventure with bolt-on graphics. It has bolt-on sound too: a portentous melody accompanies the opening sequence, but thereafter nothing is heard. The opening is nothing more than a slide show and theme tune before entering the standard text adventure environment.

Yet the text adventure environment is not quite standard. There is a bar at the top that shows the location and the turn number. There is a bar at the bottom that shows the input commands and the space between contains the textual responses to the commands. So what is not standard? The unusual element of the game is that the player can control almost any character in the game.

Take me Siriusly

The initial character is an alien called Sirius, but it is possible, and sometimes necessary, to take other personae. 'Become Sondra' moves the player to Sondra's point of view. And this is the really interesting aspect of the game: Sondra is telepathic. Tell Sondra to read another character's mind and the screen splits into two. Sondra's point of view is displayed on one side and that of her subject is shown on the other. This would be pretty useless if the characters were together, but the technique is not constrained by distance. Sondra can see what other characters see. This applies even to minor characters.

The ability to switch points of view is a key feature of the game. So is the continuing activity of characters independent of the player's activity. Without the interference of the player and Dr Cortex's team of heroes, the game's characters will continue about their business.

No review of an adventure game is complete without reference to the parser – the bit of the program that interprets the player's commands – and it has become traditional to grumble about its limitations. **Demoniak** is the first game to use Palace Software's Pure Fiction game engine and I have no serious complaints about the parser or its vocabulary.

Powerful engine

Demoniak is a well-written adventure using an exciting new engine with a versatile parser. The text is witty and the intrusive graphics are easily disabled. Obviously I loved it. Well, no... actually I found it irksome.

The ability to change points of view means that in most cases where a character will not do something that the player wishes, the solution is to become the obstructive character and make them perform the desired action. When I want the jailor to open a door I simply become the jailor and then issue the open door command. This reduces much of the exploration to mere administration.

The sheer volume of available data can be bewildering. If there are eight people in a room a look will describe the room and list all the people, the state of each person and what each is carrying visibly. Then it will list all the items that are loose in the room, all in a single paragraph. For example: Guards quarters – A large room smelling of underwear and stale socks, where the prison guards can relax before and after shifts. On view are Sirius, Sondra, Flame, Madlok, Doc Cortex, Gor, a bulky guard, a fat guard, a burly jailor and Lee Van Beef. Sondra is dead. Flame is dead. Madlok is dead. Doc Cortex is dead. The bulky guard is dead. The fat guard is dead. Sirius is carrying a red communicator, a red sonic-sabre, a barbed whip, a thick red book, a computer, a vdu, some cards, and so it continues.

Secure locks

Finally, there is a problem with the software protection mechanism. Nobody likes the notorious 'Enter the word on page 27, line 8, word 4' approach to copy protection, but we must accept that something of this kind is a necessary deterrent to software theft. A security system that locks up an entire PC seems a little extreme, but this appears to be the result of making three incorrect responses to **Demoniak**'s security.

Hard-core text adventure fans may find this game interesting for its unusual engine, but passing gamers who admire Alan Grant's comics are advised to buy more copies of *2000AD* instead. SP

Designed by
Alan Grant and Chris Stangroom

Published by
Palace Software

IBM PC

MCGA, VGA, EGA, CGA and Tandy

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NEW MAPS OF EREWHON

An occasional column on role-playing games and adventures

Cast back, said the Erewhon Cartographer, a glint like the Ancient Mariner's in his chilly eyes, cast back your thoughts to those dim remembered days when the only serious computer games were written for the Apple II; when graphics came in basic green, and sounds were limited to an anaemic 'wheep!'; when three pairs of skewed rectangles made a perfectly adequate dungeon; when 32K was par for the course, and 128K a distant, shimmering mirage; when steam-powered horseless carriages ruled the roads... Back in those distant days, oh Best-Beloved, the only games worthy of attention came from the USA, cost an amazing amount of money, and were only imported by a handful of dedicated and impecunious enthusiasts.

Things changed, slowly at first and then with increasing speed: 8-bit gave way to 16-bit, the Atari ST marched bravely onto the stage, screen colours multiplied insanely, and a few mad visionaries – whom no one took seriously – muttered among themselves about the Promised Coming of the PC.

That's newts to me

What didn't change was the overwhelming dominance of American software publishers in the adult games market (that is, the market for anything that didn't require the reflexes of a fighter pilot and the intellect of an aphasic newt). For reasons largely to do with the age and background of game players in the USA, companies such as Origin, Sir-Tech, SSI and Infocom seemed to design everything worth a second look, with the UK almost entirely bogged down in the production of mindless shoot-em-ups.

Later still, of course, British games designers came of age, often surpassing their American rivals in inventiveness – but then, this merely confirmed the view of the games racket as an Anglo-Saxon closed shop. The trouble with an effective oligopoly such as this is that in the long run, it inevitably results in stagnation and a shortage of new ideas; anybody doubting this need only count the number of **Dungeon Master** clones which have surfaced in the past 12 months. All the more reason, then, to welcome the arrival of French and, most recently, German contributions to the field of serious adventure games. Interestingly, games from both these countries display some very culture-specific traits.

It is worth identifying one obvious potential source of problems with imported software – language. Although translation is hardly critical in the case of games whose entire text files would fit comfortably on the back of a pack of Gauloises, it does become important once a game gets beyond the level of **Space Invaders**. Surprisingly, given the cost of games development these days, many publishers just refuse to hire competent professional translators.

Herring aid

The worst case of translationese I've come across occurs in the infamous **Legend of Faerghail** from Reline Software GmbH, whose screen provided the following gem: 'In ancient times, a King of all Priests by the name of naMorhan created twelve staffs, nine of which were made of clay, another two were crafted from wood and the last, he made of silver. After this, he ordered his scholar-knights to find second-hand bushes and to trudgeon to death, with the use of an oak tree, the biggest herring of the forest. His scholars, unitedly, said as a man; "No way. Never"... and went off, taking with them the twelve staffs of their King'. Now, while I might just be able to accept that herring as some weird form of Teutonic folk humour, the second-hand bushes give me a migraine...

The problem with translators is that they have to be familiar with their subject and its conventions. Infogrames' **Drakkhen** is decently rendered and never lapses into gibberish, but the odd linguistic faux-pas makes it clear that the unfortunate translator was probably completely unfamiliar with the context. Thus, the astonishing news that one's (male) priest is armed with an arch and wearing a dress can be explained by the fact that both words have two meanings in French: arc means both arch and bow, and robe, depending on context, can be either a dress or a robe. Such mistakes

A legend unto itself: Faerghail, a game that lost more than something in the translation

Send in the clones: Dungeon Master has inspired a number of look-alike games over the past 12 months

by Simon Corvinus

are more than an irritant considering the importance that riddles, messages and cryptic clues have in adventures; imagine a puzzle whose answer was 'bow', and the potential problems become obvious.

French companies such as Infogrames were the earliest on the scene with a series of different and wonderful-looking games.

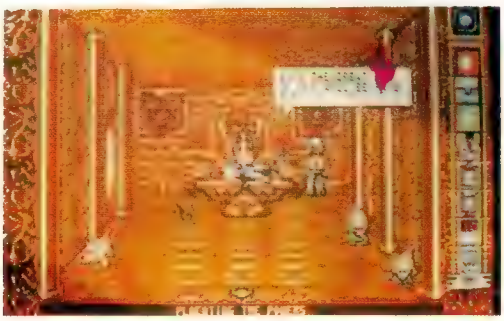
Gallic designers have never had much truck with the two standard American graphic conventions, bird's-eye-view (an icon moving across map tiles) and straight-ahead (pseudo-3D dungeon modules), choosing instead a variety of approaches, most of them directly influenced by the look, style, and layout of comic-books.

This initially disconcerting appearance is understandable given that comic-books are actually quite a good analogue for graphic adventures, and that in France have the status of high art. Forget *The Beano* and *Viz*, French bookshops these days may devote as much as a fifth of their total sales areas to sometimes marvellously drawn, inventive, sophisticated and extremely expensive hardback *bandes desinées*, most of them with fantasy, science-fiction or cyberpunk settings.

Flagging performance

The only problem was (and frequently still is) that behind the flashy artwork might frequently lurk an unplayable game. One gets the impression that designers, totally bemused by the endlessly inventive graphics, have got into the bad habit of ignoring crucial details such as plot and interface.

It's rather like '50s and '60s French cars – engineering, looks and styling which left their German and British rivals hopelessly outclassed, except that their performance never quite lived up to the promise of the wonderful styling...



A recent example of this approach is **BAT** from Ubi Soft. It looks and feels stunning, at least at first, but the player gradually realizes that all the shiny bolt-ons are nothing more than that; either they work badly, or they have no effect whatsoever on the game.

Take character generation; there's quite an interesting list of abilities available, with their levels influenced by attribute allocation, but then it slowly dawns on the player that almost all of them are dummies – one might as well have taught his character ferret breeding, for all the difference it makes.

Zero street cred

By the same token, the designers have gone to great pains to design a transaction routine which offers virtually no information, a flight simulator that suffers from infantile paralysis, and plot driver which seems to consist largely of finding crucial items around the streets.

Far better, but still ultimately flawed, is the aforementioned **Drakkhen**, a sword-and-sorcery quest whose great achievement was the first really effective point-of-view player perspective. By which I don't mean yet another **Dungeon Master** rip-off, but the real McCoy: turn around on the character's axis, and the entire landscape spins smoothly around in what must be very small increments indeed.

There are no squares or tiles here either, however notional; there is a perfectly acceptable sense of movement into and through the game world, which is itself as varied as current memory and processing limitations allow.

The bad old daze

Unfortunately, the game falls flat on its face when anyone actually tries to play it. The over-complex plot offers no markers or guidelines, so that players end up wandering around in a daze for days on end; the interface (particularly where magic is concerned) is atrocious; combat appears to be largely a matter of blind hacking; there is no explanation for most of the special items which turn up; and the active character invariably sheds followers as he moves through castles and dungeons – they usually get stuck behind a door or table, and have to be collected like stray puppies.

The great sin? Oh, you mean *the* great sin: Kult, also known as Chamber of the Sci-Mutant Priestess

On the other hand, **Kult** (Ere Informatique) is an almost flawless example of an intelligent, witty, good-looking and innovative game which is actually playable; a Citroen DS, in fact. Given the much punchier title of **Chamber of the Sci-Mutant Priestess** in the US, **Kult** has recently been re-packaged in the UK by Digital Integration, and can be picked up for all formats at under a tenner – ignore the grotesque cover art and do so. The game is a puzzle-oriented quest set in a post-holocaust future; there is no role-playing element in the sense of building up a character, but the puzzles are intriguing, the graphics are terrific, the plot manages the rare feat of being tongue-in-cheek yet perfectly consistent, and even a 10-minute session can be fun.

Legend or dog end?

If French games are quirky and innovative, the few German adventure games to crop up so far have tended to be variations, ranging from brilliant to execrable, of well-worn themes. Execrable, in fact, hardly begins to describethe aforementioned **Legend of Faerghail**, a loutish clunker of a fantasy RPG which borrows its basic design from **Bard's Tale** and a dreadful combat routine from the **Phantasy** series, in both cases with much nastier graphics. Some nice touches become completely submerged in the general dross, including a variety of skills and an effective battery of sound effects, but bad design and tedious game-play give **Faerghail** a limited lifespan; players, however, may want to persevere in the hope of more delightful text paragraphs like the one quoted previously.

Dragonflight (Thalion) is at the other extreme of the spectrum. The impression I get is that it was put together by a group of technically talented enthusiasts who did so after careful study of every other fantasy RPG ever published; it includes most elements anyone has ever come across (overland travel across large continents, teleport gates, cities and villages, point-of-view dungeons, transaction, lots of hardware and so on), most of them very well executed, but virtually nothing new. If the best French games resemble a Citroen DS, think of **Dragonflight** as a mid-range Mercedes: there are no smart-ass innovations here, but everything works perfectly. (Or almost – the over complex back-up routines don't work.)

The interface is a delight, and could almost be credited with its own AI. Commands are implemented from mouse-driven graphic menus, and there's an intuitive rightness about most operations; if the player's looking at one character's inventory, for instance, clicking on the icon of another character puts him directly onto the second character's inventory screen. Transfer an item from character A to character B, and when the player returns to A's inventory, the mouse pointer will be in its original position – obvious, elegant, and all too rare.

There's a lot of elegant touches in the gameplay as well, such as dungeon level maps that can be discovered and used, a decent variety of stand-alone and interlocking quests, and a well-designed magic system. If anything can detract from **Dragonflight**'s 'top of the conventional range' title, it's the strangely clumsy combat system, which requires characters to be moved on a sort of checkerboard grid in a corner of the graphic screen; annoyingly, there is no way of attacking diagonally or even to the side! I am also profoundly resistant to a certain smug cuteness which sometimes filters through, as for example when towns include statues to the designer's favourite fantasy authors – a slight touch of amateurism getting the better of Thalion here.

Flair enough

We can count on seeing more German games turning up in the future (Thalion has also produced a fantasy action game and an air traffic control simulation), and it will be interesting to see whether their designers get brave enough to start breaking new ground. In the meantime, they provide a welcome variety to the massive Anglo-American steamroller, as well as offering some hope to increasingly depressed ST and Amiga owners. Now, if only French flair could be combined with the best of German implementation... But that, come to think of it, has been the Holy Grail of European design for a long, long time.

We live in hope. SP

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Heart of China

Snakes, why did it have to be snakes?

By Ian Marsh

Heart of China is a graphically stunning game with an absorbing plot and highly entertaining character interaction, yet suffers from the same handicaps as its predecessor, **Rise of the Dragon**. Some of the features that have been 'improved' by the designers will no doubt be regarded by some players as added nuisances, which is a shame, because games like these have great potential, and are probably the way that computer role-playing games and graphic adventures should go.

For **Heart of China**, Dynamix has moved from cyberpunk to 1930s B-movie adventure in the style of Indiana Jones. Again, the background can be readily assimilated by players simply because it is familiar – there can be few games players who have not seen at least one of the Indy films.

The lead character in this game, Lucky Jake Masters, is typical adventurer material. He's a former Great War ace who is in debt: the only way out of his predicament is to rescue the kidnapped daughter of the man who holds the fate of his air freight business in the (bank) balance.

Lucky numbers

Starting in Hong Kong, Lucky has to collect the first member of his team, a Chinese ninja called Zhao Chi, before setting off to rescue the gorgeous pouting Kate Lomax. Kate, however, is no spoiled daughter of a millionaire: she's the spoiled daughter of a millionaire turned nurse, dedicated to healing sick Chinese peasants. And, like the heroine in **Rise of the Dragon**, she's a babe. Let's face it, in 256-colour VGA with pictures based on shots of actors, Dynamix has to use pretty models to create the traditional focus of male interest.

Pausing briefly to absorb the background information, and learning how to use the mouse-operated game interface, the player can quickly enter Lucky's world. And what an absorbing world it is too, especially once Chi, who in effect wears a sandwich board advertising his ninjahood, has joined the team.

Character interaction is one area Dynamix has greatly improved on since releasing **Rise of the Dragon**. Instead of controlling just one character, the player has to switch between characters to achieve objectives in the game. While one character is dealing with the right people, the other will often pass comments, creating more of a feeling that the main character is part of a team. There's also a degree of quite passable humour in verbal exchanges.

Where the system breaks down, of course, is in long exchanges between characters when no input is required of the player. This leads to the feeling that the player is little more than a spectator, watching a glorious game being played in front of his eyes by the computer. It's like watching a movie and therefore more a form of passive entertainment. This rather defeats the purpose of computer games as far as I'm concerned: I don't want just to be an observer; I want to feel I have control over the outcome.

Dynamix's concern that the player should be able to progress in an adventure is also shown by the introduction of signposts that indicate plot branches.

These alert the player to the fact that he has just gone down one of two or more possible pathways in terms of the game's script. They'd be useful if the game didn't give the overall impression that the object was to start at Hong Kong and get to Paris via Chengdu, Kathmandu, Istanbul and the Orient Express. Such plot direction makes nonsense of the idea of player choice, and therefore the significance of plot branches is lost.

Walk on by

Even worse is the walk-through of the introductory part of the adventure that is included in the manual. Of course no one has to read it, because it's only the sort of thing that poor reviewers need when faced with an imminent deadline. But one of the knottier problems of the first part of the adventure is revealed by the walk-through – a problem that might have taken about 10-minutes thought to overcome.

I for one would rather have that period of thought – suffering the usual frustration that problems in adventures are meant to cause – than to have the answer provided. Walk-throughs increase the spectator aspect of the game.

Yet again, Dynamix has persisted in the inclusion of arcade sequences in a graphical adventure. Again, there's the option to skip them, rendering them utterly pointless to the typical adventure player.

But the game's most serious problem is its length: **Heart of China** sits in 8Mb of hard disk space yet is clearly a short game that will provide only a couple of hours of entertainment each night for a week. The graphical interface is wonderful but limits the choices that can be made with the few objects available. Keep waggling the mouse pointer over the screen and all the player needs to know will be provided – or at least clues will be given by examining objects in the characters' inventories. Dialogue, too, is limited by the point and select menus, with the result that it is easy to breeze through great chunks of the adventure at once.

Someone out there, however, should definitely buy this game: the entertainment it provides is of high quality, both visually and musically. And once that person has played the game, he should flog it to the next person at a lower price. That way, once it has been through eight or so players' hands it will have provided value for money. The alternative, of course, is to go out and blow the money on all the Indiana Jones and Romancing the Stone movies. SP

Designed by
Jeff Tunnell

Published by
Sierra On-Line

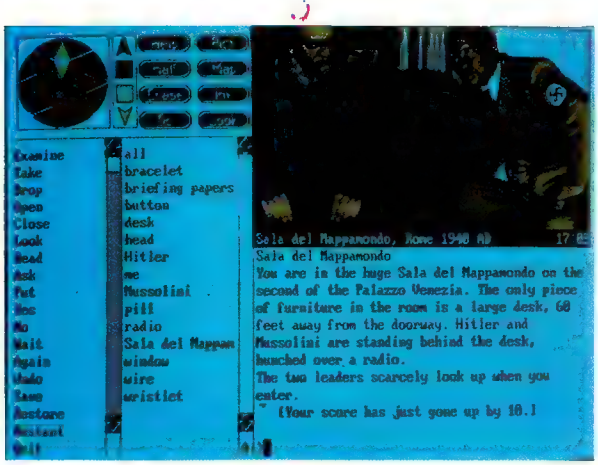
Produced by
Dynamix

IBM PC

256-colour VGA or 16-colour VGA, EGA, MCGA and Tandy

Requires hard disk, plus 286 performance or better

Roland, AdLib and Sound Blaster



Timequest

A case of Hitler or miss

By Greg Ellsworth

Written and Programmed by Bob Bates

Published by Legend Entertainment

IBM PC

16-colour EGA and VGA

Roland MT-32, AdLib, digitized real sound from internal speaker. Music and sound effects only accessible when playing from a hard disk.

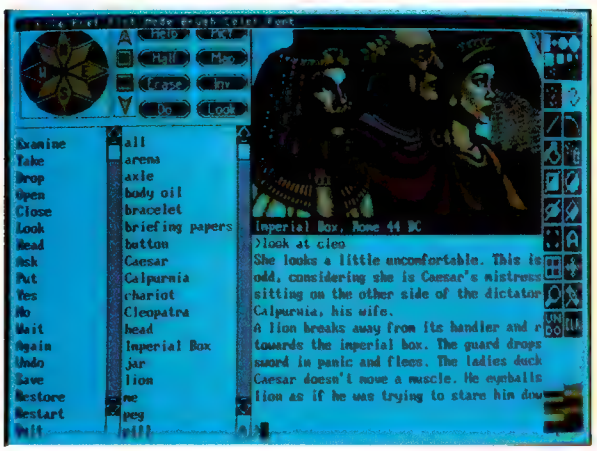
Timequest is the second adventure from Legend Entertainment, a relatively new company that arose from the break-up of Infocom.

Bob Bates wrote **Sherlock Holmes: Mystery of the Crown Jewels** and **Arthur:Quest for Excalibur** while at Infocom, and he has applied the same skill and attention to detail that made these games popular to **Timequest**.

This adventure takes (historical) time travel as its subject and is nothing if not well researched. When arriving in a new location, a brief but accurate description of that area of the world and the historical events of that period are provided, with minimal compromises made to accommodate the story line. Although a knowledge of history is not required to play the game, when I finished I knew more about ancient history than I learned in all my boring school classes added together.

Temp work

In the year AD 2090, the Temporal Corps serves to ensure that the technology of time travel is used properly – that is never to alter the past.



One of its own officers, Lieutenant Vettenmyer, took an Interkron time machine into the past and altered 10 key events in history with the objective of destroying modern civilization. He returned the Interkron to the Corps' HQ, a silent challenge to anyone to try to stop him before the effects of his changes in the past catch up with the present, obliterating everyone and everything known to man. General Drexler orders a mere private (the player) to follow the mad Vettenmyer, visiting only those timeplaces he did and putting history to right once more. The game spans the years from 1361 BC to AD 1940 and takes in such locations such as Baghdad, Babylon, Rome and Dover.

Brief encounters

The mission briefing papers included in the game list the 10 events Vettenmyer is believed to have altered, detailing what should happen, what his plan may be, what is needed doing to counter it, and the consequences of failure. For example, in the year AD 1215, Genghis Khan lay siege to the city of Peking. The Mongols, nomadic by nature, were not ones patiently to wait, and Vettenmyer has convinced Khan that the city will not fall. To counteract this the gates to the city must be opened for the Mongols to invade, otherwise they will turn and invade Europe.

Altered states

The timeplaces visited are not limited to the 10 locations where Vettenmyer altered history. The psychiatrists who studied his profile believe the madman actually wants to be caught. The technicians who examined the Interkron records show he visited at least 35 other locations, either leaving cryptic clues or items necessary to help undo his plot. All these locations must be visited to solve the puzzles and finally track down and confront the renegade.

Timequest is *big*, and non-linear. Several quests are intertwined, requiring one puzzle to be solved so that a clue for another may be obtained. The story will have the player jumping all over time, *and* visiting six different areas of the world. The game lacks the humour of Steve Meretzky that I enjoyed in Legend's first game, **Spellcasting 101**, but it wasn't meant to be a sequel nor a cheap knock-off of their previous success.

On its own, **Timequest** is a challenging game for the average player, with involving puzzles and an interesting story. The endgame is especially ingenious, and although the aftermath is not a complete surprise it wrapped up the story line pretty well.

Legend's game interface, introduced in **Spellcasting 101,** remains a pleasure to use in **Timequest**; it allows many different ways to enter commands. Using the mouse or the keyboard, a sentence can be built from menus of nouns, verbs, and prepositions. Click on a compass rose to navigate, or on the graphic scene to directly examine an object, for example.

The game can be played in several modes: text only, text and graphics, and menu mode. Function keys allow perusal of the score, inventory, a description of the current location, or display a map. The save game feature was enhanced to allow game descriptions and a menu of games to select from.

These features, combined with good stories, are bringing back life to text adventure games, reminding me of the style and challenge of the old Infocom games that I have sorely missed.

Long live Legend! SP

MAMA SEZ...

Have a cosmic encounter

Picture this... here I sit, caressing my keyboard and yearning to crack the shrink-wrap on my next game. Matilda, my dragon, is snoozing in the corner. The converted wine cellar is lit by the bluish tinted screen and a few non-glare bulbs. Hundreds of sheets of graph paper maps and diligently recorded hints have replaced the wine bottles that once occupied the racks, and a ladylike clutter of coloured pencils, disks, copy-protection papers, and survival rations surround me. Big bad Mama is ready to *game*!

But before I once again lose myself in the imagination of others, let me tell you about a game I have played recently that really crinkled my chips: Sir-Tech's **Bane of the Cosmic Forge**. **Bane** has me hooked. The as yet unnamed sequel is due out in autumn 1991, so this little rehash may be just the ticket.

Drag act

Many hard-core computer role-playing gamers have played through **Bane** several times and nearly everyone plays the second half of the game at least twice. None of us can figure out just what it is that drags us back again and again.

Possible reasons abound. There are many exotic items that are randomly available and *that* has some of us on quests. The choice of races and professions is so large and varied that just deciding on party composition and creating the characters becomes a strategy game within the CRPG. The monster-character balance is nearly perfect which allows super party conflicts with monsters that challenge the party. Although the Tiltowait spell is gone, some of the magic is spectacular in both effect and appearance.

Truly off-the-wall characters can be amazingly effective. An example of this is my Faerie Ninja, Spinner, who started out as a Mage. With a boffo spellbook and an armor class of -23 (yes, that is minus twenty-three), Spinner hangs out in the front rank and gets multiple criticals each round.

Armed to the teeth

And the weapons... ah, yes, the weapons! My current quest is to find Excalibur which is rumoured to be the prize if you fight and defeat a group of pit daemons in the temple. Meanwhile, my crew has found an abundance of superb weaponry. My Lord wields a Blade Cuisinart and a Bec de Corbin, my Valkyre sticks it to them with Maenid's Lance. The quick-footed and deadly Monk totes the Spear of Death, the Bard melees with the Staff of Aram or toots 'em to death with the Horn of Prometheus. Spinner has the fastest feet in town but carries a Bushido Blade or Sai (depending on the mood). The Samurai's Muramasa Blade gets too many critical hits to count. Fallen into disuse are Bork's Hammer, the Vulcan Hammer, The Avenger, and dozens of other awesome weapons.

The author of the game, David W Bradley, has promised that characters will retain weapons and other goodies in **Bane II**. This promise has sent many of us scurrying back to find rare and useful items like the diamond ring (your prize for successfully finding the secret Fourth Ending), a garland of roses, a PK crystal, a cameo locket, and the extremely elusive Excalibur. I suppose most of us are playing with one eye focused on the sequel. What a lark it will be to take a mega-party into the sequel, equipped to the teeth with armor and weapons and goodies!

All you need is...

Bane of the Cosmic Forge appears to have it all as a CRPG. Skills you can hone, spells you can acquire,

characters that grow in wisdom and abilities, a classic story in a convoluted plot, conflicts and conflict resolutions, puzzles, mazes, monsters, chatty and not so chatty NPC's, and on and on and on. But these things are not unique to **Bane**. Most CRPGs contain the same elements. But **Bane** seems different.

Hooked on Bane of the Cosmic Forge, or just plain stuck? Listen to what Mama has to say...

Prose and cons

What is so special about **Bane**? The discussion rages. In fact, Section 9 of the Gamers Forum on CompuServe has been a regular hotbed of controversy centered on the story, or lack of story, in **Bane** and other CRPGs. To some CRPG gamers, the story is everything, to others it is just

a device to guide the player to the endgame. A noted author suggested that **Bane** was less than a masterpiece of prose and that it lacked plot. The gauntlet was down and the ASCII began to fly. Opinions ranged from agreement with the critique to scathing rebuttals of the premise. Charges of pseudo intellectualism and juvenigw claptrap flew, but when the controversy died down, the question remained – what is the importance of story or plot in CRPGs?

Who needs plot?

There are as many answers to that question as there are gamers. Mama sez that *this* gamer's answer is that story and plot add richness to the game, and when done well can make a game. The lack of story or plot seems to have no effect on the success of CRPGs.

An example of this no story, no sweat phenomenon is **Eye of the Beholder** from SSI. **EOB** is a terrific game, beautiful to look at and mesmerizing to play. There is a big bad guy, there has been a kidnapping and a poisoning, gather your gang, find the kidnapped prince, find the cure, and kill the bad guy – end of story. Something less than classic intrigue, but effective in **EOB** because the game itself is so well done. I played through **EOB** several times and the lack of plot advancement and prosaic room descriptions bothered me not a whit.

A major criticism leveled at **Bane** was that the dialogue was overblown and needlessly verbose. It certainly seemed that way, because the author intended it to seem that way. After all, we are reading the words of a bunch of psychotic perverts who have spoken only to themselves for a hundred and twenty years! To expect brevity and meticulous conversation from this crew is like expecting flowers from Attila the Hun! Fat chance.

My feeling is that story and plot are but a small part of the CRPG experience. Poor execution of plot or a mangled story will detract from the game, but lack of either will not effect the playability of a good game. Extreme examples of story quality are **Lord of the Rings** by Interplay, and **Eye of the Beholder**.

In **LOTR**, the story is everything; in **EOB**, nothing. Both games are delightful, and **EOB** is outselling **LOTR** and **Bane** combined. **Bane** is somewhere between the two extremes and for me, has struck just the right balance.

Baneful experience

What is so special about **Bane**? Perhaps it all comes down to the fun one has while playing **Bane**. That is my excuse... I am simply having a grand old time and can barely wait for the sequel! Uh oh, Matilda stirs... time to dim the screen and let the dragon out. SP

Mama sez... Help is here

Let me tip the scales in favour of the players for a change with a few tips for **Bane of the Cosmic Forge**. T-Rex can be found where Tinkerbelle was hidden. At the drawbridge, remember Safety First and next to last. You can outwit Q by killing him, getting the password on paper, then donning the venerable Boots of Re. Smitty is a sprocket specialist. The Pyramid sequence could be called Indiana Jones and the Pits of Doom, an Idol Affair.

I found six endings to **Bane**. The first is the embarrassing Boffo ending for not using the correct terminology when describing the Pen. There are two major scenarios which hinge on whether or not you have the Silver Cross with you when you use the Key of Evil. If you keep the cross you will be faced with the violent scenario; if you drop the cross you will get the non-violent set of endings. The Boffo ending shows up in both versions.

Conventional wisdom suggests that you save the game, with the cross, at the fountain just outside of the Queen's Tomb. Make a copy of that save under another name.

If you keep the cross you must gather up all of the vampire-killing goodies hidden in the forest. If you elect to drop the cross before your first encounter with Rebecca and Dracula, you need only visit the Delphi for the Staff of Aram. If you choose this route, my advice is to wander the woods and get your experience points up through combat. Do not attempt the temple until all of your party is at level 16 or better.

Both the violent and the non-violent endings offer you two major choices, take the pen or decline the pen. If you take the pen in either version you get an official endgame message and the CF designation for each character. If you decline the pen, you then get to find Bela. In the violent version, you must defeat Bela whereupon you get the chance of a lifetime – enter the beast or stick around and wander the forest. If you accept a ride, you will get another of the official ending messages.

In the non-violent version, you get the essentially the same options, but you also get a shot at the nebulous fourth ending which is officially yours when you get the diamond ring. To do this you must ignore Rebecca's question and just tell her you love her. The ring can be used by only a female character, and it will be transferable to **Bane II**. The non-violent no-pen endings lead to the stars and beyond. All of the official (CF) endings will be acceptable in **Bane II**. Each will have a different starting point in the sequel. Happy endings!

BAT off pat

Martin Leverton on how to solve Ubi Soft's new adventure game

The main aid to solving **BAT** is to realize that despite the publicity, the game is actually quite small. The vast number of locations that occur on the adverts are mainly just separate parts of the tunnels. The only difference between these locations is the position of the slime and dirt!

Much advancement in the game depends on chance encounters with the inhabitants of Selenia. In general, keep talking to everyone all the time, except the static characters, and you will progress. Boring, but necessary.

Time to boogie

If you boogie in the nightclub in the early hours you'll meet a friend. She will lead you to a source of money, but if you are good at BIZZY you'll earn enough anyway. Anyway, she eats too much!

You meet Sloane at the arcades. He is necessary if you are to get past the guards. While you're at the machine, earn yourself a lot of money because you'll need it to hire a drag (but see hint above).

A woman in the night bar will tell you how to get into the club where Merigo hangs out. When she tells you what kind of creature you're looking for you will have to be persistent in looking for him.

Offering bribes

Talk to every passer-by, but nobody is worth more than two bribes.

Static characters (that is, who are illustrated) have only one thing to say. It's not worth paying them again.

Generally it's not worth picking a fight.

To kill Merigo you'll need good shields, but for Vrangor you will need some really heavy duty weapons.

Before *any* arcade sequence, don't forget to accelerate your heart rate.

Killing Merigo will give you something that will get you into the tunnels.

Mapping the tunnels is a chore, especially as the fatal traps are impossible to predict and there is no save facility in this part of the game. In general, don't fight the monsters, but run past them. When you are on the way out, bumping into them again will help you locate yourself.

Feeling a bit battered? Sleep helps keep up your life potential, but wastes time.

If you have the money, a good alternative is illicit drugs! It's amazing what an inhaler will do for you. Wicked, but necessary.

The instructions for getting into Vrangor's base are less than helpful. First shoot it; it will then be harmless. Bring the drag alongside it. One of its sides is darker than the others (this is the 'hole' where you blasted it). Aim the drag here and you will dock. Ignore the polygon on the side of the base unless you are heavily into insurance claims!

Bye bye or boom boom

Once in Vrangor's base you'll need the entry code you saw at the drag port. This is where Vrangor comes in. I hope you brought the Nova with you or it's goodbye.

If you did bring the Nova it's goodbye Vrangor, provided you are well protected. SP

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RES RUBLICA MUSKETIERE

Card sharps

By Brian Walker

Francis Tresham's **Civilization** is a classic for many reasons, not least the high quality of what might be described as the 'sub games' which it contains. The most interesting of these, perhaps, is the trading phases where players try to avoid becoming plague infested or, more terminally, being hit by an earthquake.

It is this particular sub game that has clearly been the inspiration for **Res Publica**, a new card game from the prolific Dr Reiner Knizia. The objective of the game is first to unify single races into large ethnic groups, and then to acquire and subsequently develop various cultural forms. All these rather grand sounding activities are achieved through the simple expedient of trading.

Pure and simple

The key number in the game is '5'. Whenever five cards representing the same race are acquired they can be traded in for a culture card. When five of the same culture cards are obtained these may be traded in for development points.

On his turn the player may 'search' or 'offer'. If the former option is chosen the player announces the particular card they are searching for: 'I am searching for two Roman cards' might be one such request. In order, the other players state what they are require in exchange. The player seeking the cards then selects what he considers the best offer.

Phased out

The alternative in this phase works in a similar way only here the player states what he is prepared to *offer*. Here, the player announces which cards he is prepared to listen to offers for, and once again selects the best proposal. Essentially, this is it then – a no-frills trading game. Memory, the staple of so many card games, plays a part in that the player who can recall what players are looking for will be at an advantage.

The development point cards come out in descending order, so it's wise to trade in cards as quickly as possible.

Track record

Given Hexagames' track record, the English translation of the rules is pretty good.

There are some amusing moments, however: 'A player is not forced to carry out all three phases.' Er, one more time: 'Each player is not forced to carry out all three phases.' And in case you're still not sure: 'Each player can leave out any phases that he wants to.' Phew! I'm glad we cleared that up.

The game places perhaps an unwise emphasis on not acting purely in one's self-interest. When a player is ahead it is essential that players force a stiff price for any trade, or even refuse to trade at all. Otherwise they will be at the winning post before you can cry 'Eureka!' This notwithstanding, **Res Publica** is a fine game and well worth forty-five minutes of anybody's time.

Musketiere

Most card games have some kind of family tree. **Hols Der Geier**, which appeared a few years ago and was published in the UK under the appalling title of **Teacher's Pet**, could trace its roots back to **Destino** and even to some obscure Indian game discovered in the days of the Raj.

Since then, **Asterix** from Spears has joined the family, and now comes yet another addition in the form of **Musketiere**, possibly the most ingenious of them all.

Unlike most of this particular family, players receive cards of differing values. The first action is to select three of these cards and place them face down. A 'cardinal' card is now turned over.

Players now select a 'musketiere' card from their remaining hands and lay it face down, whereupon all cards played are revealed simultaneously. Here, any similarity between this game and its ancestors ends. The values of all the musketiere cards are then totalled.

Cardinal card

If the total exceeds the value of the cardinal card then the player who played the highest value card receives a precious gem. If the value of the *cardinal* card is higher than that of the musketiere cards, then the player who played the lowest card takes a jailstone. The gems and jailstones are placed are placed on one of the three cards the player selected at the outset.

Stone me

At the end of the game any of these cards still containing a gem score double. Any cards with a jailstone on them score zero. During the course of the game both these stones will travel from player to player.

The game is played over several rounds until one player amasses a hundred points.

I am not a great fan of this type of game, though I have to admit this is the best. It provides the interaction crucially lacking in **Asterix** and avoids the mindlessness (fun though that is) of **Hols Der Geier**. Recommended. SP

Res Publica

Designed by
Dr Reiner Knizia

Published by
Hexagames

Price £8.95

3-5 players

Playing time 45 minutes

Musketiere

Designed by
Franz-Josef-Lamminger

Published by
Hexagames

Price £8.95

2-4 players

Playing time 1 hour

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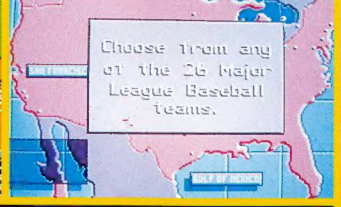

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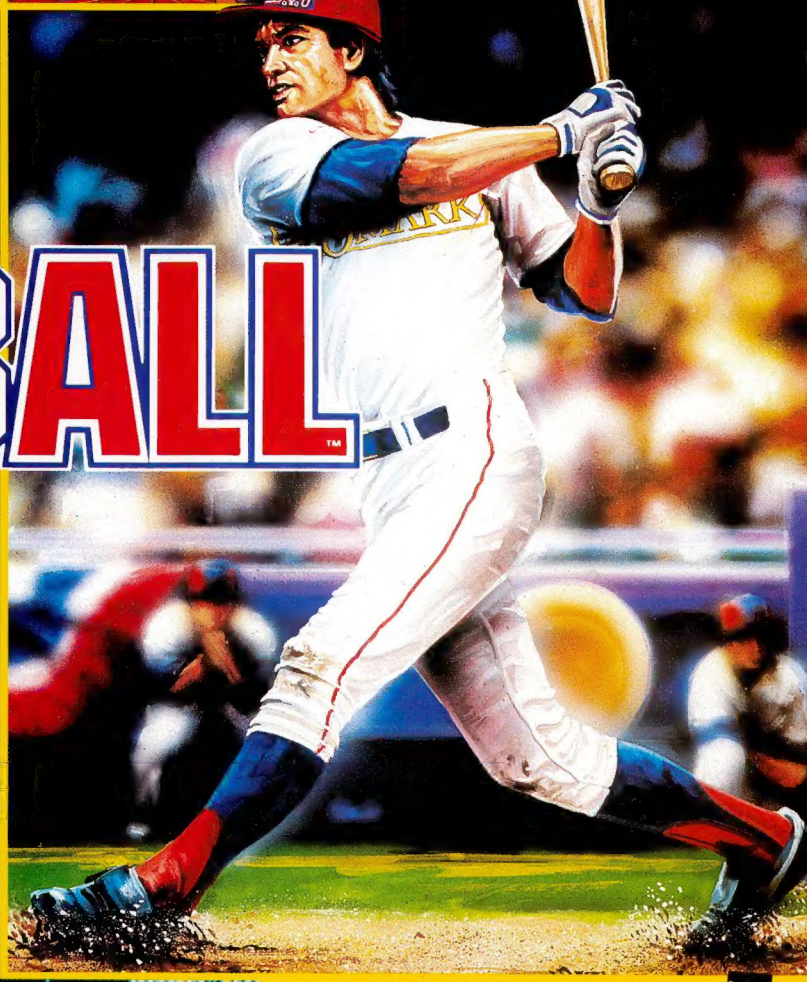

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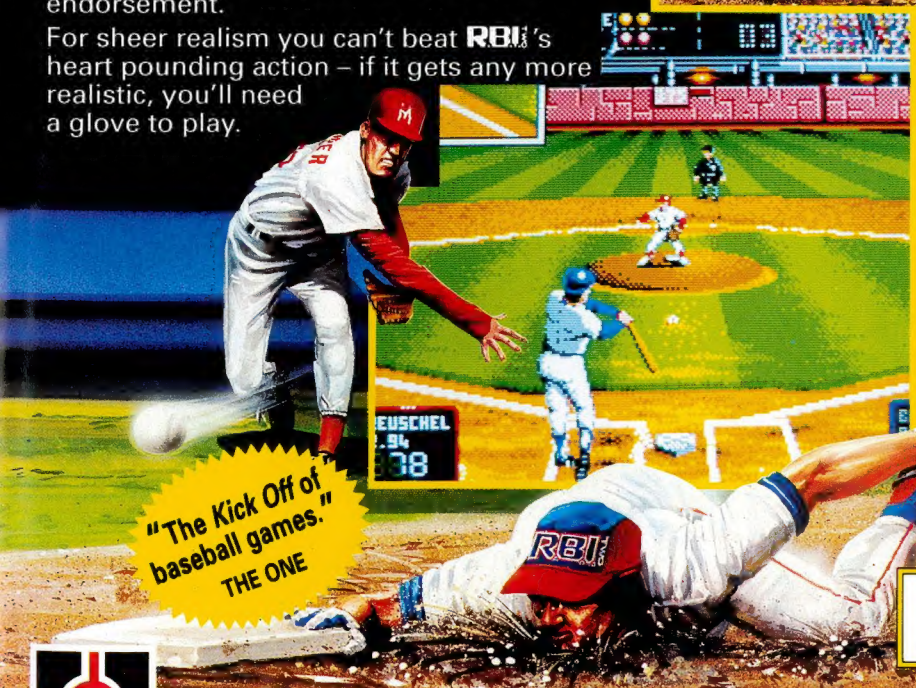

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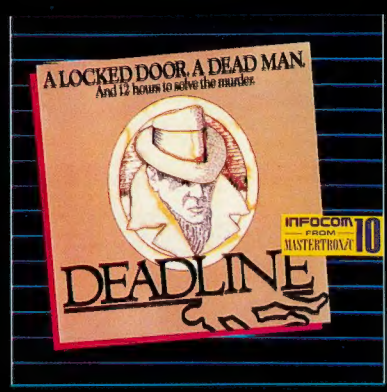

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